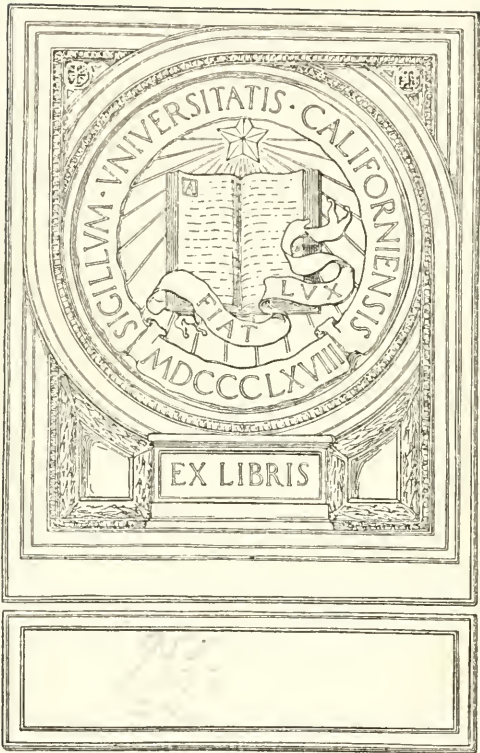




THE
SUNSET
TRAIL

• A NOVEL •

• ALFRED • HENRY • LEWIS •



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THE SUNSET TRAIL

The Sunset Trail

By ALFRED HENRY LEWIS

Author of "The Boss," "The President," "Wolfville Days," "Black Lion Inn," "Peggy O'Neal," etc.



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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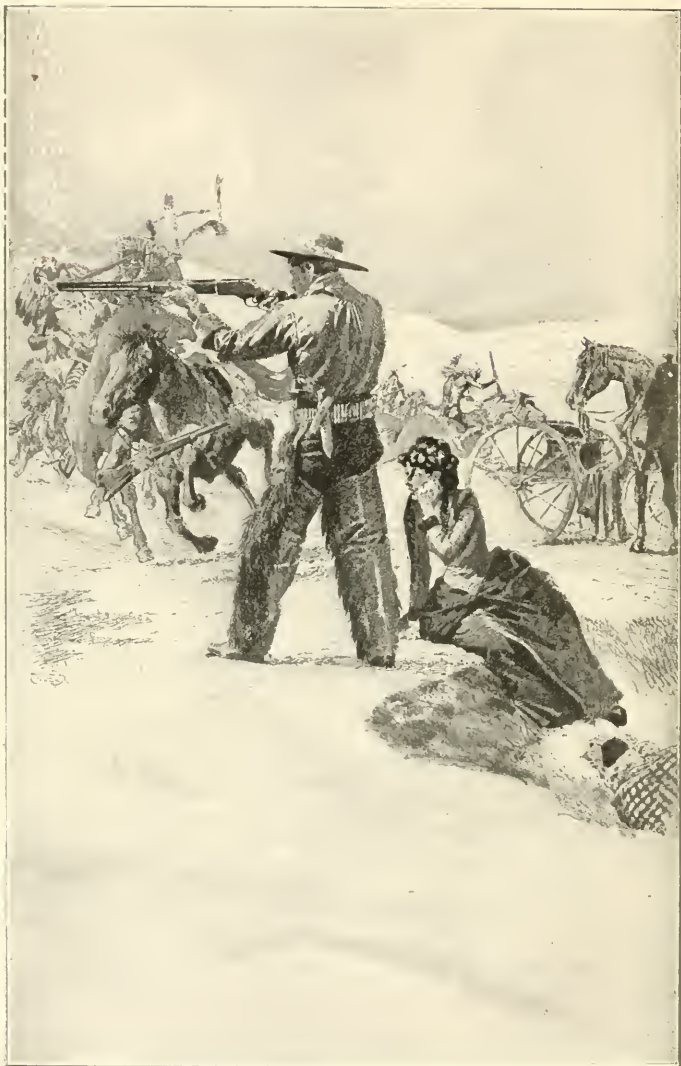
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THE CRACK OF THE WINCHESTER.

To
WILLIAM BARCLAY MASTERSON
THIS VOLUME IS INSCRIBED /
BY HIS FRIEND
THE AUTHOR

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INTRODUCTION.

IT was in my thoughts, as I wrote these chapters and arranged their sequence, to fix in types a phase of American existence that, within the touch of present time, has passed away. The West has witnessed more changes than has the East. The common impression, and one to which all Americans are bred, leaves paleface Western occupation to a modern day. Whenever one's thought wanders to what is old in this country one inevitably sets his face towards the East.

None the less, this feeling of an Eastern as an earlier settlement is error. In New Mexico and Arizona, while exploring an ancient Spanish church or considering some palace of sun-dried mud with a sixteenth-century origin, it will begin to press upon one how the East, after all, is but the younger theatre of European endeavour in this continent. Also, an odd feeling will grow, as one reflects that more than a half century before Winthrop and Standish and Bradford and Alden and those other stern and solemn ones, came ashore on Plymouth Rock, Santa Fé was a bustling capital—a

centre of agriculture, of mining, of flocks and of herds.

St. Augustine is said to be the first founded town within the frontiers of this country, as the same are made and laid to-day. And yet it is in warm dispute, with a deal to tell on the New Mexican side of the question, if Santa Fé be not the age equal of her sister of the Everglades. Certainly, and say the most disappointing thing for Santa Fé, there was a no greater space than two or three years to fall between.

Considered as regions, Florida versus New Mexico, the latter should be the older. In its settlement, that stretch lying between Santa Fé and San Francisco, and south to the Rio Grande and the now North Mexican line, was in a fairly populous and flourishing condition three centuries and more ago. To say "New Mexico" or "Arizona" hath a far-off savage sound, and yet both were dominated of European influences and polka-dotted with many a white man's town long years before Salem went hanging her witches or Pocahontas interfered to save the life of Smith. It was over three and one-half centuries ago that Coronado ransacked Colorado and Kansas for those "seven cities" and the gold he could not find.

In 1803 the first American trading expedition broke across the plains and entered Santa Fé. The expedition was planned by William Morrison, the grandfather of

that Colonel William Morrison who, following Civil War, won fame as a House leader, and proposed to reform the tariff by horizontally reducing it. Until the Morrison trade invasion of New Mexico, the West in its European complexion had been furnished by the Spanish. Also, about this time the English and Scotch, with the Canadian French to aid them, came pushing southward and westward from British Columbia in a search for furs.

The fur trade grew apace. Beavers were first the purpose, then buffaloes, with such peltry folk as bears and wolves and foxes and otters and muskrats to be their incident. For fifty years the beaver was the great source of Western wealth; then came the buffalo to roundly cover twenty-five years. After that, the cattle; to be followed by the railway and the farm.

If one were to catalogue those human influences that have dealt with the West, the count in its procession would run somewhat like this: There was the Indian occupation—an occupation that has never wholly given way. In the sixteenth century, say in 1550, came the Spaniard with what we call “civilisation” and the Indians call “devilry,” to colour the control, and hold a West’s directing rein, for two hundred and seventy-five years. Then befell the English-speaking invasion from the sunrise side of the Mississippi. There was a beaver day, a buffalo day; and, covering both the beaver and the buf-

falo days, there was also a trader day, with its Santa Fé and Oregon trails.

On the heels of all these came the cattle day and the day of the herds, with the farm day slowly dawning. It is with that latter day, the cattle day, that I have dealt. In doing this I have seized on a real man and, in its tragedy at least, told what really happened. Speaking for its broader lines, this book is true, and there be scores who will recognise its incidents.

ALFRED HENRY LEWIS.

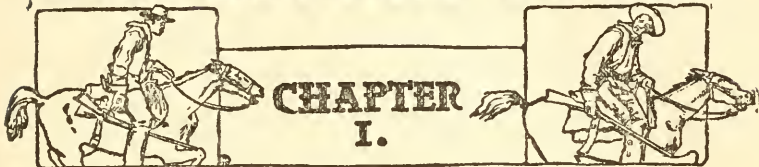
New York City, February, 1905.

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THE SUNSET TRAIL

THE SUNSET TRAIL



Courtesy of COLLIER'S WEEKLY

HOW IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN DIFFERENT.

HIS baptismal name was William Barclay, but before the corn-coloured pencilling on his upper lip had foretold the coming of a moustache, he was known throughout that wide-flung region lying between the Platte and the Rio Grande, the Missouri and the Mountains, as Bat. This honour fell to the boyish share of Mr. Masterson because his quick eye, steady hand, and stealthy foot rendered him invincible against bears and buffaloes and other animals, *ferae naturae*, and gray oldsters of the plains were thereby reminded of a Batiste Brown who had been celebrated as a hunter in the faraway heroic days of Chouteau, Sublette, Bridger, and St. Vrain.

There is no such season as boyhood on the plains, folk are children one day, men the next, and thus it befell with Mr. Masterson. He owned, while yet his cheek was as hairless as an egg, primeval gravities and silences, and neither asked nor answered questions, neither took nor gave advice. Among his companions of the range he gained the reputation of one who "attends strictly to his own business"; and this contributed to his vogue and standing, and laid the bedplates of a popular confidence in Mr. Masterson.

Also, Mr. Masterson, being few of years and not without a dash of the artistic, was in his way a swell. His spurs were of wrought steel traced with gold, the handkerchief—an arterial red for hue—knotted about his brown throat was silk, not cotton, while his gray sombrero had been enriched with a bullion band of braided gold and silver, made in the likeness of a rattlesnake, fanged and ruby-eyed. This latter device cost Mr. Masterson the price of one hundred buffalo robes, and existed a source of wondering admiration from Dodge to the Pueblos.

As a final expression of dandyism, Mr. Masterson wore a narrow crimson sash wound twice about his waist, the fringed ends depending gallantly down his left leg. The sash had come from Mexico, smuggled in with a waggon load of Chihuahua hats, and when Mr. Masterson

donned it, being privily a-blush to find himself so garish, he explained the same as something wherewith he might hogtie steers when in the course of duty he must rope and throw them. Doubtless the sash, being of a soft, reluctant texture and calculated to tie very tight into knots that would not slip, was of the precise best material with which to hogtie steers; but since Mr. Masterson never wore it on the range and always in the dance halls, it is suspected that he viewed it wholly in the light of a decoration.

Mr. Masterson's saddle, as exhibiting still further his sumptuous nature, was of stamped leather; while his war-bags and leggings were faced with dogskin, the long black fell warranted to shed rain like a tin roof. The one thing wanting a least flourish of ornament was Mr. Masterson's heavy, eight-square buffalo gun—a Sharp's 50-calibre rifle.

And yet this absence of embellishment was not because of Mr. Masterson's want of respect for the weapon; rather he respected it too much. A rifle was a serious creature in the eyes of Mr. Masterson, and not to be regarded as jewelry; to mount it with silver or inlay its stock with gold would have been as unbecoming as to encrust a prayer-book with diamonds. Mr. Masterson's rifle's name was Marie; and when abroad on the range he made remarks to it, and took it into his

confidence, apropos of events which transpired as part of the day's work.

When Mr. Dixon, for whom Mr. Masterson was killing buffaloes along the Canadian, told that young gentleman how his visiting sister and niece would pass a fortnight at the 'Dobe Walls, the better to realise a virgin wilderness in all its charms, Mr. Masterson made no comment. Behind his wordlessness, however, Mr. Masterson nourished a poor opinion of this social movement. At its best, the 'Dobe Walls, as well as the buffalo range of which it lived at once the centre and the ragged flower, was rude beyond description, and by no means calculated—so Mr. Masterson thought—to dovetail with the tastes of ladies fresh from Beacon Hill. Besides, Mr. Masterson was not satisfied as to the depth and breadth of what friendships were professed by certain Cheyennes, who hunted buffaloes in the neighbourhood of the Canadian, for their paleface brothers and sisters.

Mr. Masterson's opinions on this point of Cheyenne friendship was not the offspring of surmise. Within the month, eight Cheyennes, supposed by the authorities in Washington to be profoundly peaceful, had come upon him while busy with both hands husking the hide from a buffalo bull. Full of the Washington impression of a Cheyenne peace, at least so far as deeds done of daylight and on the surface were concerned, Mr. Mas-



TOLD HIM TO "VAMOS."

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terson paid no mighty heed to the visitors. Indeed, he paid none at all until one of them caught up his rifle from the grass, and smote him with it on the head. The Cheyenne, cocking the gun and aiming it, told him in English learned at Carlisle, and, with epithets learned at the agencies, to *vamos* or he'd shoot him in two. With the blood running down his face, Mr. Masterson so far accepted the Cheyenne suggestion as to back slowly from the muzzle of the rifle until he reached the edge of a ravine, upon which he had had his mind's eye from the beginning. Then he suddenly vanished out of harm's way.

Once in the ravine, Mr. Masterson flew for his camp, distant not a quarter of a mile. Getting a second rifle, Mr. Masterson bushwhacked those vivacious Cheyennes at the mouth of Mitchell's Canyon, and killed four, among them the violent individual who had so smote upon him with his own personal gun. The lost rifle, which was as the honour of Mr. Masterson, was recovered; and inasmuch as the four scalps were worth one hundred dollars in Dodge—for which amount they were a lien upon funds heaped together by public generosity to encourage the collection of such mementoes—it might be said that Mr. Masterson was repaid for his wound. He thought so, and in the language of diplomacy regarded the incident as closed.

For all that, the business was so frankly hostile in its transaction that Mr. Masterson, young of years yet ripe of Western wisdom, went more than half convinced that the Panhandle, at the time when Mr. Dixon decided to have his fair relatives pay it a visit, did not offer those conditions of a civilised safe refinement for which ladies of culture would look as their due. Mr. Masterson was right. Mr. Dixon's approval of his sister and her daughter in their descent upon the 'Dobe Walls was weakly foolish. Still, neither Mr. Masterson nor any one else felt free to show this truth to Mr. Dixon, and preparations for the tender invasion went briskly forward.

As Mr. Masterson was buying cartridges in the outfitting store, which emporium was one of the mud structures that constituted the 'Dobe Walls, he observed that Mr. Wright was clearing away the furniture from the office, this latter being a small room to the rear of the store.

"Going to give it to Billy Dixon's sister and her girl," explained Mr. Wright.

"When do they hit camp?" asked Mr. Masterson, mildly curious.

"Day after to-morrow, I reckon; they're coming over in a buckboard. Billy says there's a French party, a Count or something, who is coming with them. It looks

like he's going to marry Billy's niece. If he shows up, he'll have to bunk in with you buffalo killers over in Hanrahan's saloon."

"Just so he don't talk French to us," said Mr. Masterson, "I won't care. I've put up with Mexican and Cheyenne, but I draw the line at French."

There were a score of men at the 'Dobe Walls, and Ruth Pemberton confessed to herself that Mr. Masterson was the Admirable Crichton of the array. She secretly admired his powerful shoulders, and compared him—graceful and limber and lithe as a mountain lion—with the tubby Count Banti to that patrician's disadvantage. Also, Mr. Masterson's hands and feet were smaller than those of Count Banti.

Ruth Pemberton and Count Banti made brief saddle excursions up and down the banks of the Canadian. Mr. Wright, using sundry ingenious devices to that end, had trained one of the more sedate of the 'Dobe Walls' ponies to carry a lady without going insane. The training was successful, and the bronco thus taught to defy the dread mysteries of skirts and sidesaddle, had been presented to Ruth Pemberton. While Ruth Pemberton and Count Banti rode abroad, Madam Pemberton uplifted herself with George Eliot's novels, and the sermons of Theodore Parker.

Ruth Pemberton and her noble escort never traveled far from camp, for Mr. Wright had convinced them that Cheyennes were not to be trusted. The several specimens of this interesting sept whom they saw about the 'Dobe Walls, trading robes for calico and cartridges, served by their appearance to confirm the warnings of Mr. Wright.

When not abroad in the saddle, Ruth Pemberton developed a surprising passion to know intimately the West and its methods, rude and rough. She asked Mr. Masterson if she might go to school to him in this study so near her pretty heart. That young gentleman, looking innocently into her slumberous brown eyes, said "Yes" directly. Or rather Mr. Masterson, lapsing into the Panhandle idiom, said,

"Shore!"

Being thus permitted, Ruth Pemberton, when Mr. Masterson galloped in from his buffalo killing and the Mexican skinners had brought home the hides in a waggon, would repair to the curing grounds, the latter being a flat, grassy stretch within two hundred yards of Mr. Wright's store. Once there, she looked on while Mr. Masterson pegged out the green hides. It interested her to see him sprinkle them, and the nearby grass, with poisoned water to keep off hidebugs. The hidebug, according to Mr. Masterson, must have been an insect

cousin of the buffalo, for he came and went with the robe-hunters, and lived but to spoil hides with the holes that he bored in them.

Ruth Pemberton asked Mr. Masterson questions, to which he replied in one syllable. Also she did not pay sufficient attention to Count Banti—giving her whole bright-eyed time to Mr. Masterson. Whereat Count Banti sulked; and presently deserting Ruth Pemberton he withdrew to Mr. Hanrahan's saloon, where he was taught draw-poker to his detriment. Count Banti, when he left Ruth Pemberton, expected that she would call him back; she did not, and the oversight made him savage.

One morning, while they were riding among the river-side cottonwoods, Count Banti became hysterical in his reproaches; he averred that Ruth Pemberton tortured in order to try his love. Proceeding to extremes, he said that, should she drive him desperate, he would destroy Mr. Masterson. At this, Ruth Pemberton's rice-white teeth showed between roseleaf lips; she smiled in half admiration upon Count Banti.

"Oh!" thought Ruth Pemberton, "if only he would kill somebody I might love him from my heart!"

The soul of Ruth Pemberton of Beacon Hill and Vas-sar, having been west of the Missouri one month and at the 'Dobe Walls two days, was slipping into savagery—

so friendly is retrogression, so easy comes reversion to type! She had supposed she loved Count Banti; and here was her soul going out to Mr. Masterson! How she dwelt upon him, when, bronzed of brow, cool of eye, alert, indomitable, he rode in from the day's kill! The rattle of his spurs as he swung from the saddle was like a tune of music!

Not that Ruth Pemberton wore these thoughts on her face. She hid them from others, she even concealed them from herself. Had one told her that she was beginning to love Mr. Masterson, she would have stared. Count Banti himself never thought of so hideous a possibility; his jealous petulance arose solely from her calm neglect of himself. Ruth Pemberton asked Mr. Masterson how old he was, and it pleased her to hear that he was several months her superior.

Civilisation is a disguise, and in travel one loses one's mask. One's nature comes out and basks openly in new suns. This is so true that the West, when a compliment is intended, says of a man: "He'll do to cross the plains with." What the West means is that on such an expedition, what is treacherous or selfish or cowardly in a man will appear. Wherefore, to say of one that he will do to cross the plains with, is a most emphatic declaration that the one thus exalted is unmarked of vices.

Ruth Pemberton, who on Beacon Hill would have paled

at a pin-prick and the red bead of blood it provoked, now thought kindly of mere slaughter, and insisted on riding ten miles with Mr. Masterson to the buffalo grounds to witness the day's work.

"But, my child!" cried Madam Pemberton.

"It's the only chance, mamma, I'll ever have to see a buffalo killed."

Madam Pemberton was not a deep mind, but exceeding shallow; to say that any chance was an only chance struck her as a reason for embracing it.

Ruth Pemberton was to journey to the buffalo grounds in the buckboard; Count Banti might accompany her, a Mexican would drive. Mr. Masterson, when told of the good company he would have on his next day's hunt, made no objection. To the direct question as to whether the country were possible for buckboards, he said it was.

"What do you think yourself, Bob?" asked Mr. Masterson, when that evening he met Mr. Wright in Mr. Hanrahan's bar, and they discussed this feminine eagerness to see dead buffaloes. "If we cross up with a bunch of Cheyennes, there may be trouble. It's a chance they'd try to capture the girl. Besides, they've got it in for me about that hair on my bridle."

"There's no Cheyennes about," said Mr. Wright. "When they drift within twenty miles of us, they are

sure to show up at the store, and I haven't seen an Indian for two days."

Count Banti took a Winchester rifle with him. There were two seats in the buckboard; Ruth Pemberton and Count Banti occupied the rear seat, the front seat being given over to the Mexican, and a basket flowing with a refection prepared by Mr. Hanrahan's darky cook. Mr. Masterson, on his buckskin pony, Houston, rode by Ruth Pemberton's side of the buckboard. Madam Pemberton remained behind with The Mill on the Floss.

The expedition skirted the suburbs of a prairie dog village, and the shrill citizens were set a-flutter, or pretended to be, and dived into their houses. The polite diminutive owls, the prairie dogs' companions, stood their ground and made obeisances. Ruth Pemberton's cheek flushed with an odd interest as she gazed at the prairie dogs and the little polite ground owls.

Off to one side a dozen coyotes loafed along, not unlike a dozen loafing dogs, keeping abreast of the buckboard. Ruth Pemberton pointed to them:

"Isn't it strange," she asked, "that they should accompany us?"

There was the emphasis of a half alarm in her tones; a coyote was not, to her eyes, without formidable characteristics. Mr. Masterson explained.

"They go with us to the kill. When we leave, there

will be a battle royal between them and the buzzards for the beef."

Mr. Masterson pushed forward to show the buckboard Mexican his way across a piece of broken ground. Count Banti took note of the parted lips, and that soft sparkle of the brown eyes, as Ruth Pemberton followed him with her glances. Count Banti made no criticism of these dulcet phenomena; he was too much of a gentleman and she too much of an heiress.

Count Banti, moved of a purpose to recall Ruth Pemberton from her train of fancy, did say that since a waggon, with the skinners, must go and come every day to bring in the buffalo hides, he was surprised that Mr. Masterson didn't ride in that waggon. It was superfluous, nay foolish, to saddle a pony under such waggon circumstances.

This idiotic conversation earned the commentator on buffalo hunters and their ways immediate grief. Ruth Pemberton wheeled upon Count Banti like a little lioness, that is, a little lioness subdued of Vassar and Beacon Hill. Ruth Pemberton said that she had never been treated to a more preposterous remark! It was unworthy Count Banti! Mr. Masterson in a waggon! One might as easily conceive of Sir Launcelot or Richard the Lion Heart in a waggon.

When Mr. Masterson returned to the buckboard, Ruth

Pemberton deftly lost her handkerchief overboard. Mr. Masterson brought Houston to the right about, and riding back stooped from the saddle and swept up the scrap of cambric from the short grass.

"Because you are so good," said Ruth Pemberton, with a smile, "you may keep it for your reward."

Count Banti ground his teeth; he expected that Mr. Masterson would bind the sweet trophy in his sombrero. Count Banti gasped; instead of tucking the dainty guerdon behind that gold and silver rattlesnake, the favoured dull one continued to offer it to Ruth Pemberton.

"I've no place for it," said Mr. Masterson; "I'd lose it."

Ruth Pemberton's brow was red as she received her property; for one wrathful moment a flame showed in the brown eye like a fire in a forest. Mr. Masterson's own eye was as guileless as an antelope's. Was he a fool? Was he deriding her? Ruth Pemberton decided that he was merely a white Indian. She appeased her vanity by turning her shoulder on the criminal and giving her conversation to Count Banti. Under these direct rays of the sun, our Frenchman's noble soul expanded like a flower; as the fruit of that blossoming he began to brag like a Sioux.

Having caught some glint of the lady's spirit, Count Banti told of adventures in India and Africa. He was

a hero; he had haunted water-holes by night and killed black-maned lions; he had stalked tigers on foot; he had butchered Zulus who, moved of a tropical venom, assailed him with battle axes.

Count Banti, pressing forward, set forth that he had been sustained as he crossed the Atlantic by a hope that he might war with America's red natives. Alas, they were broken and cowed; their spirit had been beaten down! He must return wrapped in disappointment.

Still—and now Count Banti became tender—it had been the most fortunate journey of his career. If not Mars then Venus! Count Banti had found the most lovely and most lovable woman in the world! And, by the way, would Ruth Pemberton make Count Banti delirious with joy by presenting him the handkerchief which the aborigine on the pony had had neither the wit nor the gentle fineness to accept?

For reply, Ruth Pemberton furtively wadded the poor rejected cambric into a ball about the size of a buckshot, and dropped it overboard again. And, because neither Mr. Masterson nor Count Banti saw its fall, there it lies among the buffalo grasses on the flat banks of the Canadian to this day.

Count Banti repeated his request and backed it with a sigh. Thereupon Ruth Pemberton opened both small

hands to show how that desirable cambric had disappeared. Count Banti made rueful eyes rearward as though contemplating a search.

Mr. Masterson halted the buckboard; they had arrived within a mile of the buffaloes; he pointed where hundreds of them were grazing or reposing about the base of a gently sloping hill. The heavy dust-coloured creatures looked like farm cattle to the untaught Ruth Penberton.

There was a bowl-like depression a few yards from where the buckboard came to a stop. It was grassed and regular, and one might have imagined that it had been shaped and sodded by a gardener. Mr. Masterson defined it as a buffalo wallow; he tried to make clear how, pivoting on one horn, a buffalo bull, shoulder to the ground, had excavated the cup-fashioned hollow they beheld.

While the Mexican was slipping free the team's traces, and making the few camp arrangements required for their stay, Count Banti began a lively talk with Mr. Masterson.

How long would it take Mr. Masterson to complete his day's kill?

Mr. Masterson, it seems, would kill thirty buffaloes; that would take an hour.

And then they would return?

Yes; or if the visitors tired, they might hook up and start at any moment. It was not worth while to sit through the slaughter of thirty buffaloes. The killing of one would be as the killing of another; to see the first was to see all.

Ruth Pemberton interposed; she would wait and return with Mr. Masterson.

Count Banti said he could see that killing buffaloes was slow, insipid sport. Now there might be a gallant thrill in fighting Indians—painted and perilous! Count Banti would have summoned up an interest for Indians. Had Mr. Masterson ever slain an Indian? Probably not; Mr. Masterson was a young man.

Mr. Masterson bent a cold eye upon Count Banti. Saying never a word, he sauntered over to Houston, and began twisting a pair of rawhide hobbles about his fetlocks, for Mr. Masterson, like all professional buffalo hunters, killed his game on foot. As Count Banti was ruffling over Mr. Masterson's want of courtesy, the Mexican plucked him by the sleeve.

"See!" said the Mexican, pointing to the four braids of black hair hanging from Mr. Masterson's bridle. "Cheyenne skelps; four!" And the Mexican held up four fingers.

"Scalps!" returned Count Banti, the burgundy

colour deserting his heavy face. "Where did he get them?"

"Killed 'em here—anywhere!" vouchsafed the Mexican, waving a vague paw. "Killed 'em twelve weeks ago—mebby eight—no?"

What Count Banti might have thought concerning the sinister character of the region into which he had stumbled, he was given no chance to divulge, for Mr. Masterson came up, rifle in hand, and speaking to Ruth Pemberton, said:

"Make yourself comfortable; you will be able to follow all that goes on, should you be interested in it, from the buckboard. You've brought a pair of field glasses, I see. Lucky we're down the wind! I can go straight to them."

As the ground between him and the buffaloes on the slope lay flat and open, with not so much as a bush to act as a screen, Mr. Masterson's remark about going straight to his quarry appeared a bit optimistic. However, Mr. Masterson did not think so, but seemed the sublimation of certainty; he started off at a slow, careless walk directly towards the herd.

Mr. Masterson had covered half the distance, that is to say, he had approached within a half mile of his game, before the buffaloes displayed a least excitement. When he had travelled thus far, however, those nearest began

to exhibit a slow, angry alarm. They would paw the grass and toss a threatening horn; at times one would throw up his nose and sniff the air. The wind being from the buffaloes to Mr. Masterson, these nose experiments went without reward.

Yielding to the restless timidity of the perturbed ones, who if set running would infallibly stampede the herd, Mr. Masterson threw himself on his face and began to creep. His brown right hand gripped the stock of his rifle, and he dragged it over the grass, muzzle to the rear. Also, he was careful to keep his face hidden from the buffaloes behind the wide brim of his sombrero.

The herd's interest was sensibly abated when Mr. Masterson forsook the perpendicular. So long as they were granted no terrifying glimpses of his face, the buffaloes would believe him some novel form of wolf, and nobody to fly from. Acting upon this wolf theory, they watched the creeping Mr. Masterson curiously; they stood their ground, and some even walked towards him in a threatening mood, disposed to bully.

As Mr. Masterson, eyes to the grass, crept slowly forward, a dry "Bzz-z-z-z-z!" broke on his ear from a little distance in advance. Cautiously he lifted his eyes; the rattlesnake lay, coiled and open-mouthed, in his path. Mr. Masterson pushed the Sharp's towards the reptile; at that it uncoiled and crawled aside.

For twenty minutes Mr. Masterson continued his slow, creeping advance. When he was within four hundred yards of the herd he rose on one knee. There was a big bull, evidently an individual of consequence, who, broadside on, stood furthest up the wind. Deliberately and without excitement, the Sharp's came to Mr. Masterson's shoulder and his steady eye brought the sights to bear upon a spot twelve inches square, just behind the foreshoulder.

For the sliver of a second Mr. Masterson hung on the aim; then the heavy buffalo gun, burning one hundred and twenty grains of powder and throwing a bullet eight to the pound, roared, and the bull leaped heavily forward, shot through the lungs. With forefeet spread wide, blood pumping from both nostrils, the buffalo fought desperately for breath and for strength to stand. The battle was against him; he staggered, caught himself, tottered, stumbled, and then with a sigh of despair sank forward on his knees to roll at last upon his side—dead.

At the roar of the buffalo gun, the herd, fear at their hearts' roots, began to run. Instantly a change came over them. The dying bull was to windward gushing blood, and the scent of that blood swept down upon them in a kind of madness. Their wits forsook them; they forgot their peril in the blood-frenzy that possessed

them, and charged ferociously upon their dying comrade. When he fell, they gored him with crazy horns—a herd of humped, four-legged, shaggy, senseless, belching lunatics!

“Bang!” from the big buffalo gun, and another bull stood bleeding out his life. The herd, wild and frantic, fell upon him.

“Bang!” spoke the buffalo gun; a third, shot through and through, became the object of the herd’s crazy rage.

Killing always to windward, Mr. Masterson might have stood in his tracks and slain a dozen score; the scent of the new blood would hold the fury-bitten buffaloes like a spell.

Knowing this to be the nature of buffaloes, Mr. Masterson felt profound surprise when after his third fire, and while still the last stricken bleeding buffalo was on his feet, the whole band seemed suddenly restored to their senses, and went lumbering off at a right angle.

“Cheyennes!” exclaimed the sophisticated Mr. Masterson; “they are over the brow of the hill!” Then he turned, and started for Ruth Pemberton and the others at a sharp trot.

While Mr. Masterson was creeping on the buffaloes, Ruth Pemberton from her buckboard perch, followed him through the field glasses. She saw him pause, and push forward with his rifle at the rattlesnake; while she

could not see the reptile, by some instinct she realised it—coiled and fanged and venomous—and shuddered. She drew a breath of relief as Mr. Masterson re-began his stalk. She saw him when he rose to his knee; then came the straight, streaky puff of white smoke, and the dying bull stood staggering and bleeding. Next there drifted to her on the loitering breeze the boom of the buffalo gun, blunted by distance and direction. Her glasses covered the herd when in its blood-rage it held furious wake about the dying ones.

And, what was most strange, Ruth Pemberton took a primal joy therein. She was conscious of the free, original sweep of the plains about her, with the white shimmer of the Canadian beyond. And sensations claimed her, to flow in her veins and race along her nerves, which archery and tennis had never called up. There abode a glow in her blood that was like a brightness and a new joy. If the handkerchief-declining Mr. Masterson were a white Indian, what now was she? Only she never once thought on that.

Mr. Masterson came up at top speed, and said something in Spanish to the Mexican. That hare-heart became pale as paper; instead of bringing in his team, as Mr. Masterson had commanded, he cut the hobbles of the nearest horse, and went powdering away towards the 'Dobe Walls. Mr. Masterson tossed up his Sharp's with

a half-notion of stopping him; then he shook his head cynically.

"He's only a Mexican," said he. Helping Ruth Pemberton from the buckboard, where she sat in startled ignorance, he remarked: "Get into the buffalo wallow; you'll be safer there."

"Safe?" whispered Ruth Pemberton.

Mr. Masterson pointed to eleven Cheyennes on the far crest of the hill. Then he led Ruth Pemberton to the buffalo wallow, where Count Banti was already crouching.

"You've left your Winchester on the buckboard," said Mr. Masterson.

Count Banti stared glassily, the purple of his face a dingy gray. The man was helpless; the nearness of death had paralyzed him.

Mr. Masterson shifted his glance to Ruth Pemberton. Her eyes, shining like strange jewels, met him squarely look for look; there was a heave to her bosom and a red in her cheek. His own eyes were jade, and his brows had come sternly forward, masking his face with the very spirit of war. The two looked upon one another—the boy and the girl whose rearings had been so far apart and whose natures were so close together.

"I'll get it," she said, meaning the Winchester.

Mr. Masterson made her crouch down in the bottom

of the buffalo wallow, where neither bullet nor arrow might reach her. Then, walking to the buckboard, he got the Winchester and the cartridge belt that belonged with it.

“It’s Baldy Smith’s,” remarked Mr. Masterson, as though Ruth Pemberton might be interested in the news. “It’s a good gun—for a Winchester.”

One of the Cheyennes, glimpsing the recreant Mexican, started in pursuit; the others rode down the slope for a closer survey of the trio in the buffalo wallow. Mr. Masterson threw the loop of a lariat over the head of Houston and fastened him, hopples and all, to the buckboard.

Understanding that no surprise was possible, the Cheyennes began at a sweeping gallop to circle the garrison in the buffalo wallow, their dainty little war ponies a-flutter of eagle feathers and strips of red cloth. As they circled, they closed in nearer and nearer; at less than six hundred yards they opened fire.

Each attacking buck kept his pony between himself and Mr. Masterson, firing from beneath the pony’s neck. The shooting was bad; the bullets struck the grass and kicked up puffs of dirt one hundred yards in front, and then came singing forty feet overhead. Count Banti heard the zip! zip! zip! and groaned as he lay on his face.

Mr. Masterson, who—being on his feet—was head and shoulders above the level of the flat, paid no heed to the terror-ridden Count Banti. Once he cast a look at Ruth Pemberton, making sure she was below the danger level. She, for her side, watched his expression as he stood, rifle in hand, observing the attack. She felt no fear, felt nothing only a sweep and choke of exultation. It was as though she were the prize for which a battle was being fought—a battle, one against ten! Also, she could read in the falconed frown of Mr. Masterson somewhat of that temper wherewith he had harvested those scalps on his bridle.

While Ruth Pemberton gazed in a kind of fondness without fear, the heavy Sharp's came to the sudden shoulder of Mr. Masterson. The roar of it fell upon her so close and loud that it was like a fog to her senses. Mr. Masterson threw open his gun, and clipped in a second cartridge. The brass shell flirted over his shoulder by the extractor, struck Count Banti's face. That hero—who had hunted lions by night and tigers on foot—gave a little scream, and then lay mute.

"It was this!" said Ruth Pemberton, holding up the empty shell to Mr. Masterson.

Mr. Masterson's bullet had gone through pony and rider as though they were papier-mâché. What life

might have been left in the latter was crushed out by the falling pony who smashed chest and ribs beneath his heavy shoulder.

The nine other circling bucks gathered about the one who had died. Clustered as they were, there could be no thought of missing, and Mr. Masterson emptied another saddle. With that, the others swooped on the slain and bore them off beyond the hill.

As they did so, far away to the right a single Cheyenne came riding; he was yelping like twenty wolves at once, and tossing something and catching it in his hand. The single Cheyenne was he who had followed the craven Mexican, and the thing he tossed and played with was the Mexican's scalp. When he had joined the others, and they had laid their dead in a safe place, the whole party again came riding—open order—down the long slope towards the fatal buffalo wallow.

Mr. Masterson picked up the Winchester and forced cartridges into the magazine until it would hold no more.

"They're going to charge," said Mr. Masterson, apologising for the Winchester. "It'll come handy to back up my Sharp's in a case of quick work. There won't be time to load, and a Sharp's is only a single-shot gun, you know."

Ruth Pemberton did not know, and her mind was run-

ning on other matters than guns, single-shot or magazine.

"They're going to charge?" she asked.

"Yes; but don't lose your nerve. They'll make a heap of hubbub, but it's two for one I stand them off."

The assurance came as coolly as though Mr. Masterson considered the possibilities of a shower, and was confident of the integrity of Ruth Pemberton's umbrella.

"One thing!" said Ruth Pemberton wistfully.

"Yes?" said Mr. Masterson, his eye on the Cheyennes, his ear on Ruth Pemberton.

"Don't let them take me! Kill me first!"

"I've intended to from the beginning," said Mr. Masterson steadily. "First you, then me! You know the Western saying for an Indian fight: Always save your last shot for yourself!"

There was nothing of despair or lack of resolution; he spoke as speaks one who but gives a promise to one who has reason to receive it. He offered it without fear to one who accepted it without fear, and when he had spoken Ruth Pemberton felt as cheerfully light as a bird. She had a desire to seize on the Winchester and take her stand with Mr. Masterson. But her ignorance of Winchesters was there to baffle her; moreover Mr. Masterson, as though he read her impulse, interfered.

"Stay where you are!" he commanded.

From where she crouched in the buffalo wallow, Ruth Pemberton heard a whirl of yells, and the grass-muffled drumming of many hoofs; and the yells and the hoof-beats were bearing down upon her with the rush of a tempest. There came a rattle of rifles, and the chuck! chuck! of bullets into the soft earth. In the midst of the din and the clamour she heard the bold roar of the buffalo gun. Then she saw Mr. Masterson snatch up the Winchester, and spring clear of the buffalo wallow to the flat, grassy ground in front. Feeling nothing, knowing nothing beyond a resolution to be near him, live or die, she was out of the buffalo wallow as soon as was he, and on her knees at his feet. She could seize on no one element as distinct and separate from a whirling whole, made up of blur and smoke and yell and rifle crash, with feathers dancing and little ponies charging like meteors! She was sure only of the rock-bound fact to which she clung that Mr. Masterson never moved from where he stood. She heard the spitting, whip-like crack of the Winchester, so different from the menacing voice of the buffalo gun, as working it with the rapidity of a bell-punch he fired it faster than she could count.

The thing was on and by and over in a moment; the charging Cheyennes went to right and left, unable to ride up against that tide of death which set so fiercely in their faces. Nine Cheyennes made that charge upon

the buffalo wallow ; Ruth Pemberton counted but four to flash to the rear at the close. The four never paused ; their hearts had turned weak, and they kept on along the river's bank, until at a low place they rode in and went squattering across. Five riderless ponies, running wild and lost, gave chase with neighs of protest at being left behind.

Out in front, one of the five Cheyennes who had been shot from his saddle in the charge raised himself, wounded, on his elbow. Mr. Masterson, who had recovered his Sharp's, sent a bullet into his head. Ruth Pemberton, even through the tingling trance of battle that still wrapped her close, turned cold.

"What else?" inquired Mr. Masterson. "We don't run any Red-Cross outfit in the Panhandle."

Ruth Pemberton made no reply ; her fascinated eyes saw where a trickle of blood guttered the cheek of Mr. Masterson. She thought no more on dead or living Cheyennes, but with a great sob of horror came towards him, eyeing the blood.

"Only a nick," said he. "You can't fight all day without a scratch or two."

Count Banti began to stir. He sat up in a foolish way and looked at Ruth Pemberton. She turned from him, ashamed, and let her gaze rove to where the Cheyennes, far beyond the river, were rounding the cor-

ner of a hill. There was nothing she could say to Count Banti.

Mr. Masterson loosened and mounted Houston, which seasoned pony had comported himself throughout the *mêlée* with the steadiness which should go with his name. Presently he rode back to the buffalo wallow, and instead of four, there were eleven scalps on his bridle rein.

“A man should count his *coups*,” he vouchsafed in explanation.

There was no need of defence; Ruth Pemberton, without understanding the argument which convinced her own breast, looked upon those scalps as the fitting finale of the morning’s work.

Mr. Masterson caught up the buckboard horse, mate to the one upon which the Mexican had fled, and strapped a blanket on its back for the use and behoof of Count Banti—still speechless, nerves a-tangle. Then Mr. Masterson, taking a spare cinch from his war-bags, to the disgust of Houston, proceeded with more blankets to construct a pillion upon which Ruth Pemberton might ride behind him. Houston, as he felt the cinch drawing, pointed his ears resentfully.

“Well?” threatened Mr. Masterson.

Houston relaxed the resentful ears and acquiesced with grace, fearing worse.

Mr. Masterson from the saddle held out his hand; Ruth Pemberton took it and, making a step of the stirrup which he tendered, sprang to the pillion.

“You can hold on by my belt,” quoth Mr. Masterson.

And so they came back to the 'Dobe Walls; Ruth Pemberton's arms about Mr. Masterson, her cheek against his shoulder, while her soul wandered up and down in a world of strange happinesses, as one might walk among trees and flowers, with birds singing overhead.

Four days; and the buckboard bearing Ruth Pemberton, Madam Pemberton and Count Banti drew away for the North. A lieutenant with ten cavalrymen, going from Fort Elliot to Dodge, accompanied them by way of escort.

“And so you hate the East?” Ruth Pemberton had asked Mr. Masterson that morning before the start, her eyes dim, and her cheeks much too pale for so innocent a question.

“No, not hate,” returned Mr. Masterson, “but my life is in the West.”

As the buckboard reached the ridge from which would come the last glimpse of the Canadian, off to the south and west, outlined against the sky, stood a pony and rider. The rider waved his sombrero in farewell. Ruth Pemberton gazed and still gazed; the hunger of the brown eyes was as though her love lay starving. The

trail sloped sharply downward, and the picture of the statue horseman on the hill was snatched away. With that—her life turned drab and desolate—Ruth Pember-ton slipped to the floor of the buckboard, and buried her face in her mother's kindly lap.

CHAPTER II.

THAT TRANSACTION IN PONIES.

AUNT NETTIE DAWSON, because of her tenderness of heart and the hard acridities of her tongue, had made for herself a place in the popular esteem. The well-to-do and healthy feared her for her sarcasms, while upon the sick she descended in the guise of an unmixed blessing. Those who mourned, and by whose hearths sat trouble, found in her the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

Cimarron Bill was the personal nephew of Aunt Nettie, the other inhabitants of Dodge being nephews and nieces by brevet, and it was to Cimarron Bill that Mr. Masterson was indebted for the advantage of Aunt Nettie's acquaintance.

"She's some frosty, Bat," explained Cimarron Bill, in apology for the frigid sort of Aunt Nettie's reception, "she's shore some frosty. But if you-all was ever to get shot up, now, for mebbly holdin' four aces, or because you

had become a drawback to a quadrille, she'd nacherally jump in an' nuss you like you was worth savin'."

Mr. Masterson and Cimarron Bill had met for the first time the Autumn before, and their friendship came about in this fashion. Sun City, a thriving metropolis, consisting of a tavern and a store, lay far to the south of Dodge and close against the Indian Territory line. Mr. Masterson, coming north from the buffalo range, rode into Sun City late one October afternoon, and since his affairs were not urgent decided to remain till morning.

Mr. Stumps, proprietor of the Palace Hotel, being the tavern aforesaid, wore an uneasy look when Mr. Masterson avouched his intention to tarry, and submitted that his rooms were full.

"Leastwise," observed the doubtful Mr. Stumps, "all three beds is full but one; an' that is took by Cimarron Bill."

"Is this Bill person here?" queried Mr. Masterson.

"Well he ain't exactly here none just now," responded Mr. Stumps, "but he's liable to come pirootin' in. He p'inted out this mornin' for Tascosa; but he's a heap uncertain that a-way, an' it wouldn't surprise me none if he was to change his mind. All I know is he says as he rides away, 'Don't let no shorthorn have my room, Mr. Stumps, as I may need it myse'f a whole lot; an' in case

I do I don't want to be obleeged to bootcher no harmless stranger for its possession.' ”

“All the same,” said Mr. Masterson with asperity, “I reckon I'll take that room.”

“Thar'll be an uprisin' if Cimarron Bill comes back,” said Mr. Stumps, as he led Mr. Masterson to the second floor.

“You won't be in it,” replied Mr. Masterson confidently. “I won't ask you to help put it down.”

Mr. Masterson was searching his war-bags for a clean blue shirt, meaning to do honour to Sun City at its evening meal. Suddenly a youth of his own age appeared in the door. So cat-foot had been his approach that even the trained ear of Mr. Masterson was given no creaking notice of his coming up the stair. The youthful stranger was equipped of a dancing eye and a Colt's-45, and Mr. Masterson by some mighty instinct knew him for Cimarron Bill. The question of identity, however, was instantly made clear.

“My name's Cimarron Bill,” remarked the youthful stranger, carefully covering Mr. Masterson with his weapon, “an' I'd like to ask whatever be you-all doin' in my apartments?” Then, waiving reply, he went on: “Thar, don't answer; take the short cut out of the window. I'm fretted, an' I wants to be alone.”

Mr. Masterson, to facilitate those proposed improve-

ments in his garb, had unbuckled his pistol and laid it on the bed. Cimarron Bill, with militant genius, stepped in between Mr. Masterson and his artillery. Under these convincing circumstances the suggested window seemed the one solution, and Mr. Masterson adopted it. The twelve-foot leap to the soft prairie grass was nothing; and since Cimarron Bill, with a fine contempt for consequences in nowise calculated to prove his prudence, pitched Mr. Masterson's belt and pistol, as well as his war-bags, after him, the latter was driven to confess that erratic personage a fair and fearless gentleman. The tacit confession, however, served as no restraint upon his movements, and seizing his weapon Mr. Masterson in his turn went cat-foot up the stair. As had Cimarron Bill before him, he towered presently in the narrow doorway, his steady muzzle to the fore.

"Jump!" quoth Mr. Masterson, and Cimarron Bill leaped from the same window which so lately had been the avenue of Mr. Masterson's departure.

Cimarron Bill did not have the luck which had attended the gymnastics of Mr. Masterson, and sprained his ankle. Whereupon, Cimarron Bill sat up and called for a glass of liquor, solacing himself the while with evil words. Following the drink, Mr. Stumps negotiated a truce between his two guests, and Mr. Masterson came down and shook Cimarron Bill by the hand.

“What I like about you,” said Cimarron Bill, as he met Mr. Masterson’s courtesy halfway, “is your persistency. An’ as you seem sort o’ took with them apartments of mine, on second thought we’ll ockepy ’em in yoonison.”

Mr. Masterson and Cimarron Bill became as Damon and Pythias. In the months that followed they were partners, killing buffaloes and raiding Indians for ponies, share and share alike. Mr. Masterson came finally to know Aunt Nettie. And because Cimarron Bill loved her, he also loved her, and suffered in humble silence from her caustic tongue as did his mate. For was not the fortune of one the fortune of the other? and were they not equal partners in all that came their way?

Cimarron Bill’s most glaring fault was a complete inaptitude for commerce. It was this defect that taught him, while at play in Mr. Webster’s Alamo saloon, to place a value on “queens-up” so far in advance of their merits, that in one disastrous moment he was swept clean of his last dollar and his last pony. For a buffalo hunter thus to be set afoot was a serious blow; more, it smelled of disgrace. Your Western gentleman, dismounted and obliged to a painful pedestrianism, has been ever a symbol of the abject; also his standing is shaken in what social circles he affects. These several truths were abundantly known to Cimarron Bill, and on the

morning after his bankruptcy he begged the use of a pony from Mr. Masterson with a purpose of straightening up his prostrate destinies.

"I'll ride down," explained Cimarron Bill, easily, "to the divide between Medicine Lodge Creek an' the Cimarron, an' the first Cheyenne who comes teeterin' along on a proper pony ought to fit me out. I won't be afoot long enough to wear out my moccasins; you can bet a blue stack on that!"

Cimarron Bill's plan to remount himself was one feasible enough. True, as stated in a previous chapter, there existed an official peace between the Cheyennes and their paleface brothers. Unofficially, it was the quenchless practice of both sides to kill and scalp each other, whenever an opportunity linked with secrecy and safety was presented. It was the pleasure of the Cheyennes to fall upon isolated camps of buffalo hunters and exterminate them; the broad prairies, had they spoken, would have told a hundred such red stories. By way of reprisal, the enterprising paleface wiped out what Cheyennes crossed his path. Moreover, it was the delight of the paleface, when not otherwise engaged, to raid a Cheyenne village, and drive off the ponies. The ponies, saleable as hot cakes, went at thirty dollars the head in Dodge; wherefore the practice, apart from the thrill and joy thereof, was not without its profit. Cimarron Bill, however, did

not contemplate a raid; what he aimed at was a single pony, and there were safer, even if more sanguinary methods by which a single pony might be arrived at.

Bear Shield's band of Cheyennes had pitched their tepees on the Cimarron, thirty miles to the south of Sun City. The region was a fair hunting ground, rife of buffalo. The attraction to Bear Shield's people, however, was Sun City itself. What was a thirty-mile ride to a Cheyenne, with nothing upon his mind but fire-water? The latter refreshment abode privily to his call in Sun City, and he might purchase at the rate of a pint for a buffalo robe. So brisk was trade that every day from one to a dozen Cheyennes, whose hearts were low and thirsty, rode into Sun City, each with a modest pack of robes, to presently ride forth robeless but rapturous.

Southward from Sun City ran the trail for that point on the Cimarron where Bear Shield and his tribesmen, their squaws and papposes and dogs and ponies, lived and moved and had their aboriginal being. As the trail crossed Medicine Lodge Creek it crowded the base of a thickly wooded knoll, at the back of which a bald precipice fell away for a sheer two hundred feet.

It was the wont of that paleface, who felt pressed upon by the need of a Cheyenne scalp or pony or both, to lie in hopeful ambush on the wooded knoll. He would not grow weary with much watching; his re-

ward was sure to appear within the hour, in the shape of a drunken Cheyenne, reeling in his saddle with the robe-bought hospitality of Sun City fifteen miles away. The sullen Sharp's would speak, and the bibulous Cheyenne go headlong. Then the paleface who had sniped him would mount his own pony with speed, and round up the riderless pony of that Cheyenne who had been. Once the Cheyenne's pony was secured, the paleface would scalp and strip his victim; then, using his lariat, he would drag what he didn't want to the precipice adverted to, and toss it over.

Full two hundred leading citizens of Bear Shield's village had been blotted out, before the Cheyennes became aware of their fate and the grim manner of it; for the paleface never exposed his ambush by letting any Cheyenne get away. If the census of the Cheyenne party exceeded the count of rifles on the knoll, they were permitted to ride by in innocent drunkenness, unconscious of the death they had grazed. As for what dead Cheyennes went over the cliff, certain coyotes and ravens, educated of a prevailing plenty to haunt the spot, would in an hour remove the last trace of their taking off. Full two hundred Cheyennes, the flower of Bear Shield's band, were sent to the happy hunting grounds, at the base of the wooded knoll on Medicine Lodge Creek, before their wondering relatives solved the puzzle of their

disappearance. Once the gruesome riddle was read, the Cheyennes as a nation painted for war. It was then that Bear Shield drove North like a storm, leaving Sun City a memory, and killing out the last injurious pale-face for forty miles around. That, however, is to one side of our narrative, which has to do with Cimarron Bill, about to re-establish himself as a mounted and therefore reputable member of society.

Mr. Masterson sought to dissuade Cimarron Bill from his enterprise. It was not that he objected to the other's vigorous scheme of gaining a remount; he wasn't so tenderly given towards Cheyennes as all that. The government, in favor of appearances, might pretend to preserve the Cheyenne; but Mr. Masterson knew that in reality no close season for Cheyennes existed more than it did for gray wolves. But the wooded knoll on Medicine Lodge Creek was distant; to go and come meant days; the profit, one pony, was slight for so much effort and time and travel. Mr. Masterson, in comparison with the investment, pointed out the meagre sort of the reward. Also he offered to give Cimarron Bill a pony.

Mr. Masterson's arguments availed nothing; Cimarron Bill was in that temper of diligent virtue, common with folk who have just finished a season of idleness and wicked revelry. He declined Mr. Masterson's pony; he would win a pony for himself.

“No se’f-respectin’ gent,” observed Cimarron Bill, “can accept gifts from another gent. As you sow so shall you reap; havin’ recklessly lost my pony, I must now win out another by froogality an’ honest industry. Besides it ain’t jest the pony; thar’s the skelp—worth twenty-five dollars, it is, at the Dodge Bank. That’s a bet you overlooks. With that pony, an’ them twenty-five dollars for the skelp, I can begin life anoo.”

“Then,” returned Mr. Masterson, disgustedly, “if you’re going to play the fool, and waste five days and ride seventy-five miles and back to get a thirty-dollar pony and a twenty-five-dollar scalp, I might as well be a fool mate to you, and go along.”

“No, you stay here,” expostulated Cimarron Bill. “I might get downed; in which event it’ll be for you to look after Aunt Nettie.”

Cimarron Bill, despite his restless ways and careless want of forethought, always provided for Aunt Nettie. This was no work of difficulty; Aunt Nettie’s needs were neither numerous nor expensive, and, since a gentleman of the lively accuracy of Cimarron Bill could in the season kill and cure for his share fifty dollars’ worth of buffalo robes a day, they were readily overcome.

“One hundred shots,” Cimarron Bill was wont to say, “from my old eight-squar’, an’ Aunt Nettie is fixed for one plumb year.”

Mr. Masterson was about to remonstrate against remaining in Dodge, but Cimarron Bill interrupted.

"As a favor to me, Bat," he said, "merely as a favor to me. I won't be gone a week; an' I'll feel easier thinkin' you're left to look after Aunt Nettie in case of accidents. It's inside o' the possible, d'ye see, for this B'ar Shield outfit to get me; an Injun, now an' then, does win a pot, you know."

Mr. Masterson made over to the use of Cimarron Bill a chestnut broncho, famous for bottom and bad habits. After he had cantered away, Mr. Masterson reflected uneasily on Cimarron Bill's anxiety over Aunt Nettie, the same being out of common. Mr. Masterson thought this a portent of bad luck. The notion made Mr. Masterson nervous; when Cimarron Bill had been absent a fortnight and no news of him, the nervousness grew into alarm.

"I wonder," mused Mr. Masterson, gloomily, "if those Bear Shield outcasts have bumped him off. He was that careless, Bill was, some such turn might have been waiting in the deck for him any deal at all," and Mr. Masterson sighed.

Mr. Trask's freight teams came sauntering into Dodge from Fort Elliot; they might have cut the trail of the missing Cimarron Bill, and Mr. Masterson sought the Trask mule-skinners for information. They had

freighted through Sun City, indeed their route ran by the wooded knoll so fatal to Cheyennes; not one, however, had heard sound or beheld sign of the vanished Cimarron Bill. At that, Mr. Masterson buckled on his six-shooter, thrust his rifle into the scabbard that garnished his saddle, and while the frost was on the short dry buffalo grass one December morning, sped southward for news.

At Sun City, Mr. Stumps of the Palace Hotel bore testimony that Cimarron Bill had passed one night at his caravansary, making merry, and departed full of confidence and Old Jordan in the morning.

“But he didn’t pack no outside liquor with him,” observed the experienced Mr. Stumps, who was capable of a deduction, “an’ what jag he carried would have been worn plumb away long before ever he reached Medicine Lodge Creek.”

Mr. Stumps averred that this was the last and all he knew of Cimarron Bill.

Mr. Masterson might have gone thirty miles further and interviewed Bear Shield himself. That befeathered chieftain, however, was a savage of prudence and counsel, and no one to boast of paleface scalps, though a thousand were drying in the lodges of his people. No, nothing could be gathered from the Cheyennes themselves. It was less trouble, and quite as sagacious, for

Mr. Masterson to believe that Cimarron Bill had fallen a Cheyenne sacrifice, and abandon investigation. Adjusting it, therefore, in his own mind that Cimarron Bill had perished, Mr. Masterson started for Dodge, cogitating vengeance.

Mr. Masterson, while sad, was not to be shocked by a thing so commonplace as death, even though the one fallen had been his own blanket-mate. And he blamed no one—neither Cimarron Bill nor the Cheyenne who had taken his hair. Such events were as the certain incidents of existence, and might be counted on in their coming. Yesterday it had been the fate of Cimarron Bill; it might be his own to-morrow. Meanwhile, by every Western rule, it was his instant business to take a price from the Cheyennes, in scalps and ponies, for the lost life.

And there was Aunt Nettie. Mr. Masterson recalled the final urgency of Cimarron Bill's exhortations to look after her in case he never returned.

"And I surely will," ruminated Mr. Masterson. "When he said that, Bill must have felt, even if he couldn't see, the cloud that hung over the future."

Mr. Masterson deemed it his duty to acquaint Aunt Nettie with the demise of Cimarron Bill; at the terror of such a mission he shook in his saddle. Slowly he rode up to the little three-room cottage where Aunt Nettie made her home.

“Miss Dawson,” began Mr. Masterson, for while the lady was “Aunt Nettie” in the conversation of Dodge, she was invariably “Miss Dawson” to her face, “Miss Dawson, I’m afraid Bill’s dead.” Mr. Masterson faltered as he spoke these words. “If I knew how,” he went on, “to break the information soft, I’d do it; but such delicate plays are beyond my reach. All I can do is ride in and say that in my judgment Bear Shield’s outfit has downed him.”

“Oh!” retorted Aunt Nettie, retaining, with hand on hip, that attitude of scorn which she had assumed as she listened to Mr. Masterson, “oh, all you can do is ride in an’ say that in your judgment”—the word came off Aunt Nettie’s tongue most witheringly—“B’ar Shield’s outfit has downed my Billy! Well then let me tell you this, Bat Masterson; thar ain’t no Cheyenne ever painted his face who could corral my Billy. Thar, *vamos*; I ain’t got no time to waste talkin’ to children in their teens—which you ain’t seen twenty none as yet, Bat Masterson—who can’t think of nothin’ better to do than come pesterin’ into camp with a theerv that them B’ar Shield felons has bushwhacked my Billy.”

“But, Miss Dawson,” urged Mr. Masterson, “what I wanted——”

“No matter what you wanted.” interrupted Aunt Nettie. “You get yourself together an’ pull your freight!

If, as you says, in your jedgment Billy's gone, what be you doin' in Dodge, I'd like to ask? Why ain't you back on the Cimarron gatherin' ha'r an' ponies, an' gettin' even for Billy? Thar, line out o' here! While I'm throwin' away time on you-all, my bread's burnin'. I can smell it plumb here."

"Aunt Nettie," thought Mr. Masterson, as he withdrew, "is goin' to be a difficult lady to take care of. It's four for one, when I have to offer her money, or try to hang up a hindquarter of buffalo in her kitchen, she'll chunk me up with stove-wood, or anything else that's loose and little, and handy at the time. However, it'll have to be gone through with; Cimarron Bill is dead, and his last word was for me to look out for Aunt Nettie."

As he swung into the saddle, following his visit to Aunt Nettie, a flush of shame and anger, which even the terrors of that formidable spinster could not suppress, showed through the bronze on Mr. Masterson's face. The taunt about being in Dodge when he ought to be over on the Cimarron, harvesting a vengeance, had stirred him deeply. To have it intimated that his courage was slow, and his friendship cool, wore sorely on the soul of Mr. Masterson. It was the harder to bear when flung from the tongue of a woman; for his hands were tied, and his mouth was closed against resentment.

“One thing,” thought Mr. Masterson, by way of self-consolation, “the man never made a moccasin track in Dodge who could have said as much and got away. Aunt Nettie’s right though; I ought to be evening up for Billy right now.”

Time stood a week later, and along the shallow Cimarron—as in every other region civilised or savage—it was Christmas night. The weather was mild, the bare earth without frost, while on the slow wind creeping in from the north there rode the moist odour of snow. The moon, old and on the wane, was swinging low in the western sky, and what dim lights it offered were made more dim by a constant drift of clouds across its yellow face.

Scattered along the north bank of the Cimarron, a straggling mile or more, stood the tepees of Bear Shield’s people. It was well beyond midnight, and nothing vocal about the camp save the occasional short yelp of a dog, made melancholy by the hour’s lonesomeness. Now and then an ember of some dying fire burned for a fierce moment, and then blinked out. Mr. Masterson, riding slowly down the opposite bank, and taking shrewd care to keep deep within the shadow of the woods, counted seventy-two lodges—a probable population of seven hundred and twenty, for a plainsman’s census argues ten to a lodge.

Mr. Masterson had located the band of ponies, which made up the riches of Bear Shield, late in the dull gray afternoon, while he lay hidden in a dry arroya. As it grew darker, he had crept nearer, keeping ever the location of the ponies which, in a rambling, ragged herd, were grazing up the wind. Mr. Masterson, on the south bank of the Cimarron, was heedfully to leeward of the herd; a proper piece of caution, for an Indian pony, at the earliest paleface taint to alarm the breeze, will scream like a wronged panther.

Arriving at the place where he meant to ford the river and begin his drive, Mr. Masterson halted for a cloud of unusual size and thickness to blanket the blurred radiance of the dwindling moon. Such a cloud was on its way; from where it hung curtain-wise on the horizon it should take ten minutes before its eclipse of the interfering moon began.

While he waited Mr. Masterson removed his sombrero and fastened it back of the cante by a saddle-string. Also, he unstrapped his blanket and wrapped it about his shoulders, for it was part of Mr. Masterson's strategy to play the Cheyenne for this raid. It was among the chances that he would run across an Indian herder or meet with some belated savage coming into camp. The latter was not likely, however, since the last journey an Indian will make is a night journey. The

night is sacred to spirits, and he hesitates to violate it by being abroad; in the day the spirits sleep.

While Mr. Masterson waited deep beneath the cottonwoods, a splash from the river's brink would now and again show where the bank was caving, or the crackling of branches, and the profound flapping of great wings overhead, mark how some wild turkey—a heavy old gobbler, probably—had broken down a bough with sheer stress of fat, and was saving himself from a fall. Far away could be heard the faltering cry of a coyote, bewailing a jackrabbit which he had not caught.

That thick cloud, waited for, began to encroach on the moon, and Mr. Masterson, his pony stepping as though walking on a world of eggs, headed for the river. The place had been well considered; there was no tall bank off which to plump, but instead a gradual sandy descent.

The pony walked into the water as silently as a ghost. The current rippled and rose in petulant chuckles of protest about the pony's legs; but, since its deepest was no more than to the hocks, Mr. Masterson honoured it with scant attention.

Among Bear Shield's ponies was a giant mule, renegade and runaway from some government train. This long-eared traitor remembered his days of burden, and the thing to please him least was the sight or sound or scent of a paleface. The paleface was the symbol of

thralldom and sore stripes, and the old bellsharp desired none of his company.

By stress of brain, which counts among mules as among men, the old bellsharp had risen to the rank of herd leader, and the Bear Shield ponies would drill and wheel and go charging off at his signal. As Mr. Masterson and his pony scrambled up the bank a flaw in the wind befell, and a horrifying whiff of the stealthy invader reached the old bellsharp. Thereupon, he lifted up his voice in clangorous condemnation, after the manner of his species. The harsh cry echoed up and down the slumbrous Cimarron like an outcry of destruction.

With that cry for his cue, Mr. Masterson drove home the spurs and began a rapid round-up of the startled ponies. At the warning call of the old bellsharp, the herd members came rushing towards him. Placing himself at their head, his "hee-haw" of alarm still ringing like a bugle, he bore them away at a thunderous gallop for the tepees.

Hard at the hocks of the flying battalion came Mr. Masterson. The outfit swept through Bear Shield's village for its entire length, Mr. Masterson lying low along his pony's neck and letting his blanket flap in the wind bravely, for purposes of deception. After the ponies, charged Mr. Masterson; after Mr. Masterson,

charged a riotous brigade of dogs; the uproar might have been heard as far as Crooked Creek.

As the mad stampede swept on, ever and anon a pony more blind or more clumsy than his fellows would bump into a lodge. At that, an indignant Cheyenne would tear aside the lodge-flap, protrude his outraged head, and curse the ponies aboriginally. Observing the blanketed Mr. Masterson, the savage would go back to bed, gratefully taking him for some public-spirited neighbour who was striving to return the ponies to their grazing ground and inspire them with normal peace.

The flying ponies—the vociferous old bellsharp having fallen to the rear, through lack of speed—wheeled against a thick clump of cottonwood, and then broke north into the open. Their fever of fear was subsiding, they were taking a more modest pace, and Mr. Masterson began turning in the corners, and closing up the flanks, of the retreating band. He made no effort to crowd or press, but gave them every encouragement to regain their confidence, and moderate their flight. Presently the herd was jogging comfortably; and because the wind was in their faces they were furnished no disquieting notice of Mr. Masterson's paleface identity through the medium of their noses.

The ponies had traveled twenty minutes, and were cleverly bunched, when Mr. Masterson made a discovery.

Off to the right in the dull half-dark he beheld a figure, blanketed, mounted, riding like the wind, and busy with the stragglers as they pointed out of the herd. Like a flash, Mr. Masterson whipped his rifle from its scabbard. Throwing the blanket aside, to free his hands and arms, he fell a trifle to the rear, and began edging towards the stranger.

From his riding, and because he seemed so willingly bent on sending the ponies northward, Mr. Masterson felt assured that the stranger was a white man. The expiring moon threw a last parallel ray along the surface of the plains, and Mr. Masterson saw that the stranger's pony was a chestnut. Also it had the hard and bitter gait of Alazan, the bronco wherewith he had equipped Cimarron Bill when that lost one issued south from Dodge to his wiping out.

Mr. Masterson drew nearer; of a truth the jolty pony was Alazan! Who then was the stranger? Could he, by some miracle of heaven, be Cimarron Bill? Mr. Masterson gave a curlew's whistle, which had been a signal between him and Cimarron Bill. At the sound the stranger wheeled upon him.

Mr. Masterson pulled up his pony; the sharp cluck! cluck! of the buffalo gun clipped the night air as he cocked it, for Mr. Masterson was a prudent man. The stranger, sitting fearlessly straight in his stirrups, bore

down upon him with speed. Mr. Masterson watched him with the narrowed gaze of a lynx; as much as he might tell in the night, there was no weapon in the stranger's hands.

"Howdy, Bat!" cried the stranger, as he came up with a great rush. "I've knowed you for an hour."

Then Mr. Masterson let down the hammer of his Sharp's, slammed it back in its scabbard beneath his saddle-flap, and taking the stranger in a bear-hug, fairly tore him from the saddle. The stranger was Cimarron Bill; and in his youth Mr. Masterson was sentimental.

"Where have you been these weeks?" cried Mr. Masterson.

"I'll tell you later," returned Cimarron Bill. "We'd better clot up these ponies an' begin the drive, or they'll get our wind an' stampede for B'ar Shield's village."

It was beginning to snow—great soft clinging flakes, and each like a wet cold pinch of wool! The snow storm was both good and bad; it made it difficult to handle the ponies, but it subtracted from the chances of Bear Shield's successful pursuit.

Mr. Masterson and Cimarron Bill, one on the right and one on the left flank of the herd, riding to and fro like setter dogs quartering for birds, drove on throughout a hard four hours. They broke eastward to avoid Sun City; for it would have been impolite to bring those

ponies through hamlet or ranch, and so threaten it with Bear Shield's anger.

With the first of dawn the tired riders, having brought the bunch into a stretch of country choice for that purpose, halted to make an inspection. The snow had ceased to fall, and the sun coming up gave them light enough to tell good from evil as presented in the shape of ponies. While Mr. Masterson held the herd, Cimarron Bill commenced cutting out the spent and worthless ones. When the weeding was over, there remained one hundred and thirty head, and the worst among them worth thirty dollars in the Dodge corrals. Throwing the riff-raff loose, Mr. Masterson and Cimarron Bill again took up their travels at a stiff road gait. They were forty-five miles from Dodge; worn as they were, they should still reach the Arkansas and Dodge by nightfall.

"And now," quoth Mr. Masterson, when they were straightened away for the north, "what have you been doing? Aunt Nettie was scared speechless. She thought the Cheyennes had run their brand on you."

Cimarron Bill's adventures were laid open. Ten miles out from Sun City he had crossed up with Red River Tom of the Bar-8-bar ranch. That well-informed boy had told him of a dance to be given three nights away, in the new camp-house of the B-in-a-Box outfit.

"No common fandango," explained Cimarron Bill, "but the real thing, with people comin' from as far away as Tascosa an' Fort Sill. Nacherrally, I decided to attend. That Cheyenne I was after, an' his pony, could wait; the dance couldn't."

Cimarron Bill, continuing, told how he had cut across country for the home ranch of the B-in-a-Box. He arrived in good time, that is to say four hours prior to the fiddlers, which, as he expressed it, gave him space wherein "to liquor up" and get in proper key for the festival impending. While engaged upon these preliminaries he was shot in the leg by a fellow-guest with whom he disagreed.

"You see," explained Cimarron Bill, "this outlaw was a Texas ranger, an' after about six drinks I started to tell him what I thought of a prairie dog who would play policeman that a-way, for thirty dollars a month an' furnish his own hoss. One word leads to another an' the last one to the guns, an' the next news is I get plugged in the off hind laig. I wouldn't have cared so much," concluded Cimarron Bill, in mournful meditation over his mishap, "only he shot me before the first dance."

Cimarron Bill had been laid up in the new camp-house of the hospitable B-in-a-Box. Being able to mount and ride away, three days before Mr. Masterson encountered him, he had deemed it expedient to make a driving raid

on Bear Shield's village on his journey home, and carry off a handful of ponies. Thus, by a coincidence of pony-raiding impulse, the two had been restored to one another.

"For you see," said Cimarron Bill, "I was still shy a hoss, the same as when I started out of Dodge."

"All the same," observed Mr. Masterson, severely, "you ought to have sent word to Aunt Nettie."

"Send Aunt Nettie word!" exclaimed Cimarron Bill. "I wasn't that locoed! Aunt Nettie would have been down on me like a fallin' star! Shore! she'd have descended on that B-in-a-Box outfit like a mink on a settin' hen! I saveyed a heap better than to send Aunt Nettie word."

Vast was the joy of Dodge as Mr. Masterson and Cimarron Bill rode in with those Bear Shield ponies; prodigious was the trade-hubbub when, over at Mr. Trask's corrals—Mr. Wright officiating as auctioneer—one by one the herd was struck down to the highest bidder. Under the double stimulation of the holidays and the ponies, commerce received a boom, the like of which had not before been known in the trade annals of Dodge. In proof whereof, not alone Mr. Short at the Long Branch but Mr. Kelly at the Alhambra declared that never since either of them last saw the Missouri, had so much money been changed in at roulette and farobank in any similar

space of time. Mr. Wright of the outfitting store confirmed these tales of commercial gorgeousness, and Mr. Masterson and Cimarron Bill were greeted and treated as public benefactors. Meanwhile, far away on the ravished Cimarron, Bear Shield was making wrathful medicine, and dancing the dances and singing the songs of him who has been robbed.

“Thar, you Bat Masterson!” exclaimed Aunt Nettie, as she heaped high the banquet board before him and her prodigal nephew. “Which it goes to show how feeble-witted you be. Yere you comes ghost-dancin’ ’round with a yarn about my Billy bein’ killed an’ skelped! I told you then, what you now have the livin’ sense to see, I hope, that thar was never the Cheyenne painted his face who could down my Billy, B’ar Shield himse’f not barred.”

CHAPTER III.

INEZ OF THE 'DOBE WALLS.

INEZ was a mustang—a small, wild-born thing, and the pet of the 'Dobe Walls. Those Indians who came calling at the 'Dobe Walls sniffed suspiciously at Inez and said she was the "White Man's Medicine." When put on the scales and weighed, Inez kicked the beam at seventy pounds, or about one-eighth of what she might have weighed had she lived out the life designed for her by Providence, and escaped the dwarfing influences of bread and milk as furnished by Mr. Hanrahan's black cook.

Inez's share in the life of the 'Dobe Walls began in this way. The horse-hustler had found Inez and her little mustang mother visiting among the ponies when he went to make his morning round-up. The mother fled like a shadow, but Inez, then in her babyhood and something the size of a jackrabbit, fell into the hands of the horse-hustler. That personage of ponies rode into camp

with Inez in his arms, and presented her as a common charge. She was adopted and made much of, and soon forgot her griefs and her little mother whinnying among the hills.

Except that she ceased to grow, civilization agreed with Inez. Whether from the fright of capture or the menu of the 'Dobe Walls, and although with time she slimmed and shaped up to be the silken image of a full-grown mustang, Inez stood no higher than nine hands. One might pick her up and carry her under one's arm like a roll of blankets; and occasionally, for the fun of the thing, one did. To be thus transported, threw Inez into a temper; she was a petulant mustang, and when again on her four small hoofs—as black as jet and as shiny—she ran open-mouthed after her tormentor.

If time hung heavy Mr. Wright or Mr. Masterson would cinch a small saddle-tree onto Inez. Thereat, our peevish one arched her small spine, dropped her velvet muzzle between her fetlocks—as slender as a woman's wrists—and sunfished about the scene. Inez did not have to be trained to this trick; it was in her blood and she "bucked" by instinct.

The 'Dobe Walls consisted of Mr. Wright's store, Mr. Kimball's blacksmith shop, and Mr. Hanrahan's saloon. This latter mart, of course. The West without a bar-room would be London without a club. The 'Dobe Walls

was a casual camp of prairie commerce, pitched on the banks of the Canadian, and meant for trade with the buffalo hunters, taking skins for calico, flour, fire-water, sugar, coffee, cartridges and guns. It lay two hundred miles to the back of no-where, and Dodge, ten days' journey away on the Arkansas, called itself the nearest civilization. The fixed population counted eleven at roll-call; but what with the coming and going of the buffalo hunters there were few moments of any day or night when a count of noses would not have shown more than a score. The public ate its meals in the saloon, which Mr. Hanrahan turned into a restaurant three times a day.

Inez came with the rest to these repasts, and stood about behind the benches and looked over the shoulders of her feeding friends. This she did because it was her privilege, and not by virtue of any tooth of hunger. If by design or accident the door were closed, Inez wheeled indignant tail and testified to a sense of injury with her heels. Since she broke a panel on one of these spiteful occasions, Mr. Hanrahan had been taught to open his portals with speed. The door being opened, Inez would enter, snorting her small opinion of him who had sought to bar her from her rights.

When it rained, Inez took shelter in the saloon. Also, she passed her hours of leisure there, for while Inez declined intoxicants and went committed to water as much

as any temperance lecturer, the company she found in Mr. Hanrahan's was to her liking, being more unbuckled and at ease than were those busy ones of the stores—deep with their foolish barter.

This was in the year when the Panhandle coyote rolled in fat from much buffalo meat, and a buffalo's skin brought five dollars. The June night had been sweltering hot. In the store and about the clay floor of Mr. Hanrahan's saloon, blanket-bedded and sound asleep, lay twenty-one men. Most of them were buffalo hunters, all were equal to death at four hundred yards with one of their heavy guns. There were no pickets since there were no suspicions; for were not the Comanche, the Arapahoe, the Cheyenne, and the Kiowa their friends; and had not delegations of these aboriginal clans been smilingly about the 'Dobe Walls but the day before? The snores and deep-lunged breathings told of a sense of sure security.

Suddenly a pattering racket of rub-a-dub-dub broke on the sleeping ears. It was Inez beating an ecstatic longroll with the door for a drum.

"Who shut that mustang out?" growled Mr. Masterson.

Mr. Masterson sat up and rubbed his eyes. He glanced towards the door; it was not closed. Inez, standing inside, continued to beat it with her hoofs by

way of tocsin. Mr. Masterson through the open door could see by the blue light on the eastern-southern sky that the sun was coming up.

"What's the matter with the baby?" thought Mr. Masterson. The "baby" was one of many titles given Inez. "What's she kicking about? That Congo hasn't fed her something that gives her a colic, has he?" Mr. Masterson arose to talk it over with Inez, and learn and locate her aches.

As Mr. Masterson drew near the door, his quick eye caught a movement under the cottonwoods that a half mile away fenced the Canadian. There were five layers of tan on Mr. Masterson's face, each the work of a Panhandle summer. A moment was all he required to solve the mystery of that move beneath the cottonwoods.

"Indians!" shouted Mr. Masterson.

Then Mr. Masterson closed and barred the door. The door closed, he blazed away from a window with a six-shooter by way of general notice.

Every man jack of the twenty-one in store and bar-room was on his feet like magic. In that Western day, rather from habit than apprehension, one would as soon think of going to bed without his blankets as without his guns. Once aroused, the 'Dobe Walls was instantly an armed fort.

The Indians made a gorgeous charge. There was a

red line of them, five hundred strong—picked fighters of the Cheyennes, the Arrapahoes, the Kiowas, and the Comanches. To give them spirit and add éclat to the fray, two hundred of their friends from the Pawnees and the Osages, had come to see the fight. These copper gentlemen of peace and curiosity were seated upon a near-by hill, like an audience at a bull fight.

It was a pageant to remember—that swoop of the red five hundred over the half mile of grassy flat between the cottonwoods and the 'Dobe Walls. Great war-bonnets of eagles' feathers floated from every head. The manes and tails of the ponies streamed with ribbons. On they swept, each buck managing with his knees his saddleless, bridleless little war horse.

For a fortnight, the medicine man of the Comanches had starved and danced himself into a frenzy. He had burned "medicine" tobacco, and occult grasses, and slips of sacred cedar. Coming forth of his trances and his songs, he brought word that the Great Spirit would fight on the side of His red children. His medicine told him they might ride into the 'Dobe Walls and kill the pale-faces in their sleep with clubs. There would be no resistance; it was no more than just riding in and stripping off the scalps.

Also, there were rifles and tons of cartridges which the Great Spirit designed for His red children. These

would be as make-weight with the scalps, and pay His red children for the work of waging war. Thus preached the medicine man; and his hearers were prompt with their belief. And thereupon they made stealthy tryst on the Canadian that June morning, and without yelp or outcry or war-shout, swept down upon their prey as softly silent as spectres.

The medicine man's medicine would have been true medicine, had not the counter medicine of the white man been hard at work. Inez was so wholly of the palefaces that she disdained an Indian. Let one but cross her ladyship to windward, and with squeal of protest she furnished notice of her displeasure. Inez had gotten the taint of that line of copper battle, and fled for refuge to Mr. Hanrahan's saloon. It was her contempt for Indians, expressed on Mr. Hanrahan's door, that brought out the 'Dobe Walls to defend its hair.

There was no such Eastern foolishness as a pane of glass in any of the buildings. The mud walls were perforated with openings eighteen inches square. These let in light and air. Also, they made portholes from which to shoot. Ten seconds after Mr. Masterson's warning fusillade, two lynx-eyed gentlemen with buffalo guns were ready at each of those openings. They were a committee of reception likely to prove as warm as one might wish.

It is the vanity of the paleface to hold that he can whip twentyfold his weight in any alien race. He will prove this on the teeth of men red or yellow or black. No disaster drives this notion from his vainglorious pate. He believes it, and thereon he transacts his wars. Upheld by it, his steady, cool ferocity of heart, makes his enemies believe it also; and in the end they abandon him as the creature indomitable and above defeat. That cocky conceit of himself has gotten the paleface into uncounted trouble; and then brought him victoriously through it.

The twenty-one who waited with the buffalo guns were full-breathed specimens of their race. Wherefore, the fear of being beaten at the old game of war, which their fathers had played for a thousand years, never once crossed their slope of thought. They would cord up those flambuoyant savages; they would have a scalp to show and a new yarn to tell about their camp-fires. That was the most the coming trouble promised; looked on in that light, to repulse those savages was relaxation.

The charging Indians were a minute covering the space between those river cottonwoods and the 'Dobe Walls where the buffalo guns so hopefully awaited them.

Every charging buck wore on his bow arm a round shield of double buffalo hide. It had been stripped from the shoulder of a bull, and would stop the bullet

from a common rifle. The oncoming buck covered himself with this bull's-hide buckler. His quiver of arrows stood up above his left shoulder. As he charged, he would whip his right hand toward the quiver. Each time he brought away an arrow by the feather-end. With one motion the arrow was thrown across the bow; drawing it to the head, he sent it singing on like a hornet. The charging line of five hundred was preceded by an arrow-flight as thick as stubble, for these red experts shot so fast that the seventh arrow would leave the bow while yet the first was in the air. In that opening charge they did not employ rifles. At ranges not to run over one hundred yards the arrow would do as well. Every one of those missiles came twanging off the bowstring with a vengeful force that would have sent it smoothly, cleanly through a buffalo calf. And they must save their rifles for long range, should the war take on that shape.

"Billy," said Mr. Masterson to Mr. Dixon, his comrade of the loophole, "I'm going to hive that big one on the pinto pony." This to the end that Mr. Dixon pick out another target.

On came Mr. Masterson's selection, shield held forward and arrows streaming from his bow like splinters of white light. Mr. Masterson's finger, trained to wait instantly on his eye, unhooked his rifle the moment the

shield showed through both sights. The great bullet struck the shield where the bunch of painted feathers floated. It went through bull's-hide, arm, and savage shoulder behind the arm. The stricken one seemed to rise in the air like a kite; and then he struck the grass in a half-stunned heap to roll and clutch, and at last to lie still. Mr. Masterson snapped in another cartridge, and laughed cheerfully.

"Did you see the look of surprise, Billy," asked Mr. Masterson, "on my Indian's face? That was because he found his shield no good. The bullet went through as though the shield were brown paper, and disturbed that Comanche's military theories."

Mr. Dixon, whom Mr. Masterson addressed, made no response. He had piled up an Indian of his own, and was watching him with the keenest interest, with intent to send another bullet into him if he moved, which he didn't.

As Mr. Masterson peered forth on the heels of the charge, he counted a round dozen of the Indians, scattered carelessly about, not one of whom would ride again. The buffalo hunters had been sedulous to aim low and to see their hind-sights before they pressed the trigger. With the dozen Indians were half as many ponies, kicking and tossing in the death-heave.

The volley broke the teeth of that charge; the Indians

split on the buildings to right and left, as the stone piers of a bridge split the river's ice in the spring. They flashed by and ran into the low hills, a third of a mile to the rear. After the charge, those Osage-Pawnee spectators, on their hill of curious peace, lighted pipes; they saw that the fight was to be a long one.

"Bat," exclaimed Mr. Dixon, pointing to where Mr. Masterson's Indian lay waving his one good hand for a sign, "your buck ain't dead. Why don't you drill him ag'in?"

"Let him alone," returned Mr. Masterson. "It's like baiting a trap. If he lives long enough, you and I by being sharp can kill a dozen over him, for his people will swoop down and try to carry him off."

The big double door was the weak point. To strengthen it, Mr. Hanrahan tore loose the tall rum counter, and piled it across. This uncovered Inez, who for all her hot temper was timid and had crept behind the counter, regarding it as a cave of refuge in this trying hour. Stripped of her defences, Inez, who felt the peril though she might not understand, scuttled to the rear of the room and pushed in among a thicket of stools and poker tables, which had been thrown there to have them out of the way.

There was a lull, the Indians still hugging the hills.

Taking advantage of it, Mr. Hanrahan sent round their morning whiskey to the people at the openings.

"After the next charge," observed Mr. Hanrahan, who was not without wisdom concerning Indians, "they'll be so sick they'll give us time for breakfast."

Then a thing occurred that struck the colour from more than one brown cheek. It was the clear, high note of a bugle, sounding a rally, then a charge.

"This ain't a band of whites painted up, is it?" said Mr. Wright. "If it's another Mountain Meadow racket, boys, if we're up against white men, we're gone fawnskins!"

"One thing sure," returned Mr. Masterson, "no Indian blew that bugle. Why, an Indian can't even whistle."

White or red, again came the swoop of the enemy. Again the buffalo guns broke them and crumpled them up. They flew on, however, and took position under the cottonwoods from which they had first charged. As Mr. Masterson foretold, two riding side and side had made a dash for the wounded Indian, who still lifted up his arm. They would have gone to right and left of him and picked him up.

"Take the one to the left, Billy," said Mr. Masterson.

Mr. Masterson and Mr. Dixon carefully added the rescue party to that one whom they came to save.

"What did I tell you!" exulted Mr. Masterson, as he clicked in a fresh cartridge and closed the breech of his Sharp's.

"Which you called the turn!" said Mr. Dixon, who having been three years from Boston, now spoke with a Brazos accent.

Again the mysterious bugle sang the tan-ta-ra-ra of a rally. The sound came from down in the fringe of cottonwoods; the bugler, whoever he might be, had charged each time with the others.

As the bugle sounded, a big Osage, one of the pacific audience on the hill, started to ride over to the warriors forming their third line of battle beneath the trees. Doubtless he had thought of a word of advice to give his fighting friends, whereof they stood in need. He was gravely walking his pony across the space that lay between the red audience and the red actors in this drama of blood.

"It would be a good thing," remarked Mr. Wright, who was the Ulysses of the 'Dobe Walls, "to break that Osage of his conversation habit right here. And yet, it won't do to hurt him and bring the Osages upon us. Can't you down his pony, Bat, and send him back on foot? You're the best shot; and it would be a warning to the others, smoking on the hill, that we won't tolerate foreign interference in this fight."

Mr. Masterson notched up his hindsight for seven hundred yards. The rifle flashed; the Osage pony made a forward jump and fell. At that, the owner picked himself up, rearranged his blanket, and soberly strutted back to his tribal friends whom he had quitted. His said friends took their pipes out of their mouths and laughed widely over his discomfiture. They were pleased thus to have his officiousness rebuked. He should have kept his nose out of this scrimmage, which was not an Osage scrimmage.

The bugle called down the third charge. There came the low, thick patter of the hoofs, and soon the hail of steel-tipped arrows set in. The arrows broke against the mud walls of the building, and fell to the harmless ground. One glanced through an opening, lifting the long locks of a defender.

"Tryin' to cut your ha'r, Jim," jested his window mate. "Don't blame 'em; it needs trimmin'."

"All the same," retorted the one of the locks, "I nacherally trimmed the barber a lot;" and he pointed to a savage who was twisting out his life on the grass.

The arrow grazed Inez as it came clattering into her covert of stools and tables. Inez being dislodged, ran screaming to Mr. Masterson for protection. She knocked against that excellent marksman in time to spoil his

shot, and save the life of a Kiowa on whose destruction he had set his heart.

Mr. Masterson, a bit disgusted with the timorous Inez, picked her up and put her in a great empty bin, wherein shelled corn had been kept. Inez became instantly engaged with the stray kernels which she found in the bottom, fumbling them and tasting them with her lips, half guessing they were good to eat.

There were no more swoops ; the Indians had lost faith in the charge as a manœuvre of war. They leaped off their ponies, the most of them, and from the hills popped at the palefaces, looking from those openings in the 'Dobe Walls, with their rifles. The distance was a fair third of a mile, and the chance of a bullet finding its way to any one's disaster was as one in one thousand.

After the lapse of fifteen minutes Mr. Hanrahan's black cook began tossing up a bacon and flap jack breakfast for the garrison. Water was at hand ; Mr. Hanrahan's well had been dug cautiously inside the building for just such a day as this. While the garrison were at breakfast, a sentinel went through the man-hole and watched from the roof. There was no disturbance ; the Indians kept discreetly to the hills, and put in time with a breakfast of their own. Fighting is hungry work, and will give folk white or red an edge.

After breakfast, Mr. Masterson lighted one of Mr.

Hanrahan's cigars, and took a look from a rear window. It was well into the morning. A long six hundred yards away a score or more of the younger savages, restless with a lack of years and sore to be thus knocked about on their first warpath by a huddle of buffalo hunters, were galloping hither and yon. Their war bonnets still flaunted, and their ponies still streamed with ribbons; but where was that hot courage which had brought them a trio of times up to the muzzles of those buffalo guns? Mr. Masterson counted the distance with his eye; then he shook his head.

"Bob," said he to Mr. Wright, "I can't be sure at that range with my gun. It's got buckhorn sights—coarse enough to drag a dog through 'em. Where's that closed-sight gun you brought out last week, the one with the peep sight in the grip?"

"It's here," returned Mr. Wright, "but there's no cartridges nearer than the store."

"That's all right," said Mr. Masterson. "You boys cover me, and I'll make a dash for the store. I want to see how they're getting on over there, at that."

Mr. Masterson went through one of the eighteen-inch openings. The distant Indians saw him, but appeared indifferent. There was a tall wall of mud between the store and Mr. Hanrahan's saloon. There was a gate, but that had been closed and locked by Baldy Smith. Mr.

Masterson's plan was to crawl under the gate, being invited by an open space of at least a foot. It was better than climbing; were he to do the latter some far-off lucky savage might manage a cock-shot of him as he went over the top.

As Mr. Masterson stooped to dive beneath the gate, he shouted loudly to those in the store. He had no desire to be mowed down by his friends, upon a notion that he was some enterprising Indian, piercing their defences. At Mr. Masterson's shout, a wounded Indian, who was lying low in a clump of weeds, sat up and with the utmost good will pumped three bullets at him from a Spencer seven-shooter. The bullets chucked into a pile of chips, heaped up where the cook was wont to chop his fire wood. They buried the crawling Mr. Masterson beneath a shower of bark and chips and splinters, but did no harm.

Mr. Masterson's feelings were ruffled by the shower of chips. On reaching the store, his first care was to borrow a rifle, poke a hole in the mud wall and quiet that uneasy personage in weedy ambushade.

"I don't want him whanging away at me on my return," explained Mr. Masterson.

There were five in the store. Young Thurston had been shot through the lungs. His days were down to minutes; parched with the death-fever, he lay calling for water.

There was no well in the store as in the forethoughtful Mr. Hanrahan's saloon. The store pump was fifty yards away in the stark, undefended open.

"I reckon now," said Daddy Keeler, "I'll go fetch a bucketful. I'm the gent to go, because my eyes are too old and dim to do anything at six hundred yards. I'd just waste cartridges."

Daddy Keeler was called Daddy Keeler for two reasons. For one matter, he had passed sixty years; and for another, everybody loved him. In the West when a man is loved they give him a nickname.

Also, there are no struggles for precedence in the West. Each man plays his part in peace or war as best dovetails with his pleasure. Not one in the beleaguered store would have hesitated to run the gauntlet of those savage rifles to bring water to young Thurston as he died. Yet not one would offer to take the place of Daddy Keeler. To do so would have been in violation of Panhandle proprieties, and Daddy Keeler would have resented it to the death.

Daddy Keeler took a bucket and tossed it through an opening. For all his years and hair of gray, he was as active as a cat. He made no task of sliding through the opening after the bucket. The four who remained stood ready, should the sight of him cause a rush to cut him off. As, bucket in hand, he started for the

pump, a frightened dog, in hiding behind a heap of lumber, came forth and followed whiningly.

The savages were not slow in getting to work. They didn't charge: their stomachs were too weary for that. But their rifles cracked by twos and tens and twenties. The bullets zipped and whistled as thick as twilight bats.

The pump was sun-dried and slow; it cost two minutes to start the water from the cracked spout, and five to fill the bucket. Smack! smack! the pump was struck a dozen times, while in twenty places the well-platform was rasped or whitely splintered by the flying lead.

Daddy Keeler pumped doggedly, and never raised his head; the creaking of the pump-handle matched with the low howling of the frightened dog. Daddy Keeler's sombrero went whirling, the dog was shot down at his feet; still he pumped on. The bucket at last was filled. Daddy Keeler picked up his hat and fixed it on his head. Then he brought the bucket and passed it through the opening without spilling a drop. The next moment he had followed it, and never a mark upon him.

"It's some hot out thar in the sun," said Daddy Keeler, apologetically, wiping the great drops from his forehead. Then taking off his sombrero, and considering the double hole the bullet had left: "It was a forty-four did that; some of 'em's shootin' Winchesters."

For fourteen long, hot days the fight went on ; now and then a charge, more often long-range shooting, whereat the buffalo hunters excelled. When the fight flagged the garrison played poker, leaving one to watch.

Every night one-half the garrison must dig graves for the dead—pony and Indian alike. The argument for these sexton labours was sanitary, not sentimental. In the blinding height of a Panhandle summer it is no good thing to be cordoned about with dead ponies and dead Indians. There was never a danger ; your savage lies close, and will not move in the dark unless one crowd him. He is so much the Parthian that it is against his religion to fight in the night.

Before the burial parties tumbled an Indian into his sepulchre, they were at pains to have his scalp as an incontestable method of keeping accounts. On the fifteenth day, when the troops from Dodge relieved the siege, there were eighty topknots to tell the loss of the enemy.

Inez, when the fighting fell to long-range, cried to be lifted from her box. Inez did not fear bullets ; arrows were a different commodity and set her nerves on edge. She could see them ; besides, they smelled fearfully of Indians. As long as no arrow came spitting and splintering through the openings, Inez was without a care. She would have been content were it not for her rations

of merely bread and water. This she thought squinted at parsimony, and it aroused her spleen.

When the cavalry came riding down from Dodge the beaten remnant of that war party went squatting through the shallow reaches of the Canadian, and headed south for the Staked Plains. Then the visiting Osages and Pawnees, pipe in hand and blankets wrapped about them, came beamingly from their audience hill to offer congratulations.

"How!" said Black Feather, the Osage chief, extending his hand to Mr. Wright. "How! Heep big fight!"

Then Black Feather went over the four score scalps, and whether by tint of plume or mark of braid, hidden to the white man, confidently told the tribe of each.

"Comanche!" grunted Black Feather, picking up a scalp; and then: "Kiowa, Cheyenne, Arrapahoe," as he pawed the others over one by one.

"Who were right in this shindy?" asked the captain of cavalry.

That officer was curious to hear what Black Feather would say to the question. Black Feather, who believed firmly in the equities of force, did not hesitate.

"White man right," said he. "The longest lance is right."

What of that mysterious bugle, whereof the music so shook the men of buffaloes? It was blown by a caitiff

negro, a deserter from Uncle Sam's swart cavalry. The third charge was the black bugler's last. Striped and painted like the others, the burial party might never have known the race or colour of him had it not been for his want of a scalp lock. They took his bugle instead, and rolled him into the trench with the others.

"By the way, Bat," remarked Mr. Wright, when two days after the fight, life at the 'Dobe Walls had gone back to old-time lines, "we forgot to thank you for seeing those Indians that time. They'd have cinched us, sure, if you hadn't; killed us, as it were, on the nest. It ain't too late to take a drink on it, is it?"

"The drink goes," returned Mr. Masterson, drawing up to Mr. Hanrahan's counter, which was again happily in its place; "the drink goes, but it ought to be for Inez. It was she who gave warning. If it hadn't been for Inez every man of us would have gone with Thurston, and those eighty bucks might be riding yet. It was pretty work, Bob, to stand off five hundred Indians fourteen days, and only lose one man against their eighty." Here Inez came mincingly through the door, like a fine lady thinking on her skirts. She nosed up to Mr. Masterson for a caress. "That's right," said Mr. Masterson, patting her satin neck, "you're just in time, Lady-bird. We're going to drink to the White Man's Medicine, Inez, of the 'Dobe Walls."

CHAPTER IV.

THE WILD ROSE OF THE CANADIAN.

THE town's name was Mobeetie and, for the expansive suddenness of its springing up, might better have been Mushroom. A Cheyenne killed a buffalo in the flats that stretch from the Canadian, and as he peeled the husk from that buffalo the nearest pale-face was thirty miles away. The next day came engineers, and ran lines and mapped out town lots on the ground where that buffalo was slain; within a week thereafter Mobeetie buzzed and bustled.

Mr. Masterson, ever full of the spirit of progress, gave up buffalo hunting for the nonce, and carried "chain" and pegged corners, and did what other deeds an amateur might do towards aiding the surveyors in laying out Mobeetie. Later, he aided the public in laying out certain predatory characters who from time to time rode into Mobeetie with a purpose of spoil. These

latter intermittent lifts to law and order endeared Mr. Masterson to Mobeetie; the more since he was not, speaking strictly, a resident of that hamlet, having his roofless habitat on the buffalo range, with a home-camp at the 'Dobe Walls.

All folk, whether they be white or black or red or wheat-hued, are idolators in their hearts, and those of Mobeetie worshipped Mollie Brennan. The women worshipped her because her little feet took hold on innocence, the men for the beauty of her face—for brown of cheek, and red of lip, and with eyes as softly, gently deep as are those of an antelope, Mollie Brennan was beautiful. To her worshippers Mollie Brennan was known as The Wild Rose, and the name had been given her after this fashion:

Misled by drink, a chance-blown poet once upon a time invaded the Panhandle. Beholding Mollie Brennan, he fell in love, as poets will, and sighed on her obdurate trail for a wasted twelve-month. Because she would not listen, the poet poured forth his soul in sonnets, in which vehicle of verse he identified Mollie Brennan as "The Wild Rose of the Canadian." There were no wild roses along the Canadian, at least in any near vicinity of Mobeetie, but the love-wrung bard, more moved of the whiskey than the flora of the region, refused to be bound by that barrenness. "The Wild Rose" he made it; and, since his stanzas were granted local

hearing, the Wild Rose it became, and Mollie Brennan accepted and wore the title pleasantly enough.

But the Wild Rose resolutely declined the hand of that poet; and because she would not hear him and he must tell some one, he was wont, after the fifth cup, to sob forth his soul and its defeat to the frequenters of the Lady Gay saloon. The defeat gave general satisfaction, for Mobeetie distrusted if it did not disapprove of poets, and in that harsh hour the Panhandle thought better of a Sharp's rifle than of a sonnet. The poet, in a lucid moment, perceived as much, and, every hope of conquering the callous fancy of the Wild Rose having died, he got aboard the stage-coach for Dodge, bearing with him a bottle and a broken heart. His going was regretted at the Lady Gay, but the Wild Rose felt relieved.

Sergeant King was so early in his coming to Mobeetie as to be almost entitled to fame as one of its founders. Nor did the fact go without a value, since nothing but that residential antiquity had saved him from being warned to quit the town a dozen times.

Mobeetie confessed to no love for Sergeant King. He was dark of brow, with cruel mouth and furtive secret eye. He had been run out of Abilene, as the upshot of an enterprise wherein he combined a six-shooter with a deck of cards—the latter most improperly marked—and

which resulted in the demise of a gentleman then and there playing draw-poker against him. Also, he was that creature—most detested and soonest to die in the West—a blusterer and a bully; and when a bit unbuckled of rum he would boast of the blood he had spilled.

This latter relaxation is exceeding bad form. Mo-beetie could have overlooked the marked cards, since it is understood in the West that every gentleman, in what games of chance engage his interest, must be equal to his own protection or suffer those forfeits which nature everywhere imposes upon ignorance gone astray; it might have condoned the homicide, because, technically, it was a killing rather than a murder, and departed wore his hardware at the time; even those hang-dog facial marks of an innate treachery would have passed unchallenged, for who may help his looks? but that braggart trick of, orally, reviewing what scalps he had taken, and exulting thereat, set public sentiment flowing against Sergeant King to such a height of disfavour that no one wanted his company and but few his gold. This last should be the measure of an utter public disregard for, however blackly hated your outlaw villain may be, his gold, as a rule, partakes in no wise of his unpopularity. For what says Vespasian? “The smell of all money is sweet.”

Following her inadvertent conquest of the poet, and

his broken-hearted dismissal to Dodge, Sergeant King was that one who gave to the Wild Rose what he would have called his heart. The gift bred an alarm in her bosom beyond any induced by the rhyming passion of the sonneteer. Whereas the poet had only annoyed her, she drew back frightened in the base instance of Sergeant King. He saw and understood, and the bitterness which lay like poison at the bottom of his evil heart was stirred.

Every resident of Mobeetie, in an hour devoid of convention, was the acquaintance, if not the friend, of every other resident of that metropolis by dint of a citizenship common to both, and Sergeant King was therefore an acquaintance of the Wild Rose. However, what few words he addressed to her never went beyond the commonplace; warned as by intuition of her aversion, he offered no syllable of love. But his eyes, black, and burning with a hungry fire—half-hidden, half-bursting into flame—made no secret of those sentiments that had swept down Sergeant King; the Wild Rose could feel their glances play about her like a tongue of fire. There it stopped; if he possessed a hope of winning her, he never made it manifest—coming near her only with his eyes!

You are not to suppose that the Wild Rose went untouched of love. When a maiden refuses one man, it is a reason for believing she has given herself to some one

else. Mobeetie had grown up a brisk three hours' canter from the 'Dobe Walls, and Mr. Masterson was frequently about its causeways. Buffalo hunting would wax monotonous betimes, and in what moments it palled upon him Mr. Masterson unbent in visits to Mcbeetie. Thus the Wild Rose caught frequent glimpses of him, and the heart which had refused the poet, and was closed fast and fear-locked against Sergeant King, went following Mr. Masterson with its love. The Wild Rose learned to know the very jingle of his spurs, and their melody about the board sidewalks of Mobeetie would bring her face to the pane.

Once, the Wild Rose met Mr. Masterson as he emerged from the Santa Ana restaurant, to which place of refection he had been drawn in favour of flapjacks, and the blush that spread redly over her cheek would have told tales to one more gifted of self-conceit. The tender truth missed fire; Mr. Masterson, if he nursed opinions on the point at all, held by a theory that love ought to be confined to the East as a region endowed of what leisure was demanded by its pursuit. When the Wild Rose swept him softly, and then let fall those lids in fear lest the modest hazel depths give up their blissful secret, his mind was on Cheyennes, and how far his raid on Bear Shield's ponies one Christmas Eve might have been a source of the recent uprising

of that peevish people. He escaped news of the sweet story told by those deep fringed eyes, and the Wild Rose had the romance to herself.

And yet, while her soul's cry went unheard by Mr. Masterson, it was not to die unnoted. Jealousy is more alert than love, and Sergeant King, lounging in the doorway of the Lady Gay, surprised the look of the Wild Rose, and read its truth. The knowledge shone in upon him with a red hatefulness that was as a ray from the pit. The love which had fled from him would follow another—unsought and uninvited!

Like an icicle the thought pierced through and through the soul of Sergeant King. Wanting the touch of a jealous spur, he might have loved on for unresentful years, passively enduring the coldness which was his reward. But that Mr. Masterson should have the Wild Rose aroused in him a mindless fury that was like unto the blind anger of an animal. Even his vanity arose to edge the sense of loss and sharpen him for retaliation.

At the rough seminary wherein Sergeant King had been reared blood was taught as that one reprisal worth the while of a man, and death and vengeance were set side by side as synonyms. To determine on the taking off of Mr. Masterson was the one thing natural. It called for no motion of the intelligence; the resolution leaped instantly into being as the fruit of what he saw

and what he felt. His enemy must die, and the sole question that invited pause was: How might that enemy be blotted out with least risk to himself? He retired into an uttermost corner of the *Lady Gay* to consider and lay out his dark campaign.

Such as Sergeant King are unequal to sure bloodshed unless their nerves are stiffened by alcohol, and he caused a bottle to be brought to his elbow to assist his cogitations. He put away glass after glass, for—as those mule-skinners freighting between Mobeetie and Dodge would have phrased it—he “wasn’t able to start such a load as Bat Masterson on a cold collar.”

While Sergeant King was thus employed in bringing about that needed temperature, as though Fate were delivering his victim into his clutch, Mr. Masterson with Mr. Dixon came into the *Lady Gay*. The two sat at a table just across from Sergeant King.

It was a big day for the *Lady Gay*; the tides of custom had risen to unusual heights. There were a busy dozen about the faro table, which stood at the end of the bar; an equal number bent noisily over monte, the latter diversion being dealt by a careworn Mexican, who looked as though luck were against him. In the far end a sedate poker game prevailed.

To every man his interest; with two-score folk in the *Lady Gay*, no one observed the sombre Sergeant King,

brooding schemes of blood. A Mexican lost his last *peso* at monte, and drew out of the eager fringe about the table. Sergeant King called him with a motion of his hand. The Mexican approached, received the whispered directions, took the gold piece tendered, and disappeared. By the time Sergeant King had taken another drink the Mexican led up his pony, saddled and bridled, to the door of the Lady Gay and stood holding it by the bits, awaiting the murderous convenience of its owner. Plainly Sergeant King was opening a gate for final flight.

There be many species of courage; there are day courage and night courage, water courage and land courage, gun courage and knife courage, with forty further courages beside. And, when you have settled its sort, there remains the matter of comparison. There is a courage born of caution; it is fed and led by caution, and runs by its side like a calf by the side of the mother-cow. There is another courage, whitely desperate, which owns no element of prudence, and against which no odds prevail.

Once in the Panhandle—he may be there to-day—there lived a personage of cows whose name was Old Tom Harris. I have referred to this worthy man before. He numbered but thirty years, and the epithet of “Old” was a title of endearment which his mates of rope and

running-iron had conferred upon him to mark their admiration of his arctic dauntlessness of heart. Mr. Willingham, sheriff, having official reason so to do, aimed his six-shooter at Old Tom Harris when the latter's back was turned. Then he called upon him to hold up his hands. Old Tom Harris came 'round on his heel, but he did not throw up his hands. Looking into the point-blank mouth of the Willingham pistol, he pulled his own. Then he laid it, muzzle for muzzle, with the opposing piece of ordnance, and defied Mr. Willingham to begin his blazing work.

"You haven't the sand to shoot!" said Old Tom Harris.

And Mr. Willingham hadn't.

It might bear suggestion that the courage of Sergeant King was caution-born. With seven chances in his favour where his enemy possessed but three he would offer battle. With chances even he would be more discreet. Mr. Masterson's courage was of the Old Tom Harris stamp.

The Mexican stood at the door of the Lady Gay, holding the pony of Sergeant King. Suddenly, above the hubbub of the games, arose the voice of that unworthy.

"Thar's a hoss thief here I'd like to kill!"

In the hush that followed every eye went nervously

seeking the speaker. He stood erect, his six-shooter in his right hand and hanging by his side.

It would have been wiser, from the standpoint of his enterprise, you will say, had Sergeant King gone instantly and wordlessly to work; you will condemn the oratory as marking a lack of military intelligence.

There was a reason for the rhetoric of Sergeant King. The rules to govern Western gun-play do not permit the shooting of one's enemy in the back. It is one's notifying duty to arouse him. Once he be on his guard, and reaching for his artillery, one is licensed to begin his downfall. A violation of these laws leads to a vigilance committee, a rope, and a nearest tree.

Sergeant King was aware of these courtesies of the gun and what public resentment would attend their violation. Wherefore, and that the proprieties related might be appeased, he shouted:

"Thar's a hoss thief here I'd like to kill."

Mr. Masterson was in no wise a friend of Sergeant King, and yet he would not have called himself that person's enemy. He quietly distasted, and as quietly failed, to be on nearer than nodding terms with him. Also, he distrusted the fortitude of Sergeant King as neither granite-bedded nor iron-bound.

"I once," observed Mr. Masterson, in later exposition

of that courage of Sergeant King, and his estimate thereof; "I once saw him jump over a counter to get at a party, when he might as well have gone 'round, and the episode struck me as too dramatic. From that moment I knew the Sergeant wasn't clean strain game."

There is a telepathy of the guns. 'This was once shown when Clay Allison—but that comes later; let us return to the Lady Gay. With the first war-shout, the experienced intuition of what portion of the Mobeetic public was then gathered in the Lady Gay, went wholly aware that the feud of Sergeant King was addressed solely to Mr. Masterson. Not a whit behind the public in the feather-edged character of his apprehension, Mr. Masterson was likewise made aware of it. In logical retort and with the promptness of light, he kicked his chair from beneath him and arose to his feet.

"I reckon I'm the horse thief you refer to," said Mr. Masterson, and when he said it his six-shooter was pointing squarely at the plotting head of Sergeant King.

You have read of such a commodity as fascination, and that a sure nearness of death induces trance. It is the bird with the serpent, the mouse with the cat. It is also the palsied truth of divers men when brought within touch of cold eternity.

Of those who congeal at sight of death was Sergeant King. He had performed with reckless valour, as he

would have held it, on twenty smoke-swept fields, and more than once had killed his man. What was it now that froze him motionless? As he looked into the mouth of that Colt's-45, and beheld the gray fire in the eye beyond, for the earliest time he felt the clutch of the grave upon him. It left him still as stone; his heart became water, his cheek clay.

There was a chill pause—a silence as of the tomb! You might have heard the heart-beats of the Mobeetic public as, strung like a bow, it waited on the fatal crash.

Four seconds went ticking into the past; their passing was as the passing of four ages. Mr. Masterson, with unwavering muzzle and unblinking eye, began slowly closing in on Sergeant King, who remained as though planet-struck.

The slow advance continued until the pistol of Mr. Masterson was within an inch of the transfixed face. Then, with the abruptness of a shot, Mr. Masterson let down the hammer of his weapon, and with it smote the other on the head. It was a downright, crushing blow, and only the good thickness of the skull of Sergeant King saved him from annihilation. He dropped like some log of wood—his pistol falling from his fingers and rattling on the board floor of the *Lady Gay*. As Mr. Masterson replaced his own weapon in his belt, he kicked that of Sergeant King into a nook of safety.

"It's the notion of Mobeetie," explained Mr. Dixon to Sergeant King, when thirty minutes later the latter was mentally fit to grasp a warning, "it's the notion of Mobeetie that you'd better pull your freight. Here's your gun, thar's your hoss; an' if you've got a lick of savey, by noon to-morry you'll be either in Tascosa, Fort Elliot or Fort Sill. Any one of 'em's a heap healthier than Mobeetie, which for you at least might be deescribed as a mighty sickly camp."

It has been explained that although from Boston Mr. Dixon had fallen from those heights of strictest English to which he had been lifted by education into the slipshod accent of the Brazos.

The long speech of Mr. Dixon's, however, was not thrown away; without a word, and reeling a bit in the saddle with the blur that still hung like a cloud across his faculties, Sergeant King rode off to the west. As he disappeared where the trail led over a low hill Mr. Dixon nodded a foreboding head.

"Bat ought to have downed him," observed Mr. Dixon to those several members of the body politic assembled to witness the exodus of Sergeant King; "Bat ought to have downed him. However, he's makin' for Tascosa, an' if he'll only open his system on that outfit, you can bet Bob Pierce or Jim East'll bump him off."

"That's whatever!" assented one of Mr. Dixon's hearers.

The incident was over, and with frank accord, one and all, they returned to the *Lady Gay*, and by second drink-time in the evening—to employ a Panhandle method of marking the flight of time—the affair, as being dull and commonplace in its finale, was quite forgot. Had Mr. Masterson emptied his Colt's-45 into the head or the heart of Sergeant King the public would have talked of it for a day.

It was nine of the moonless night and Mobeetie's citizens for the greater part were gathered in store or bar or what other emporium best attracted their favour. There were no street lamps and the streets were almost deserted, since no one cared at risk of shin to blunder and-stumble in the dark.

One figure there was, however, which, avoiding the glare from front windows, stood watching in the shadows of the *Lady Gay*. The *Lady Gay* occupied the corner of two streets, and the lurking one was leaning against the side of that temple of chance. Within stretch of his hand was a small door, meant to supplement the front doors in event of a crowd.

Now the situation had its peculiar, not to say suspicious, side. Had you entered the *Lady Gay* you might have seen that Mr. Masterson, with two or three about

him, was sitting within touch of that small door. Had you returned to the lurking one without, and struck a match, you would have identified him as Sergeant King. From where he stood, with ear pressed close to the thin board wall of the *Lady Gay*, he could hear the voice of Mr. Masterson. It was by ear he had located him.

Sergeant King had returned for that revenge now twice his due. He lacked the chilled-steel courage to invade the *Lady Gay*; to shoot through the pasteboard side of the structure, and try to kill by ear, was nothing sure; the best that Sergeant King might do was wait and watch. Mayhap in the chapter of accidents it had been written that Mr. Masterson would open the little door and furnish him the opportunity for which his black soul panted.

Mr. Kimball, the blacksmith, had discounted his social position by marrying a Mexican woman; that was years before. Now Mr. Kimball's Mexican wife was ill, and the *Wild Rose*, who cared nothing for caste under circumstances of sympathy, was nursing her. Something was wanted from the drug store, not two blocks away, and the *Wild Rose* went in quest of it. She took a lantern to guide her little feet.

Sergeant King, ambushed in the shadows of the *Lady Gay*, saw the *Wild Rose* coming down the walk and knew her as the lantern-flare shone once upon her pretty face.

There was enough of cynic humour in the sinister depths of Sergeant King to half curl his lips with a smile. Here was a two-edged vengeance! He would have the Wild Rose call forth Mr. Masterson and then slay him before her eyes that loved him.

Sergeant King went sauntering to meet the Wild Rose. When she beheld him she started; he, on his part, made a motion as of gratified surprise.

"Oh, Miss Brennan," said he, "I was in the Lady Gay. Mr. Masterson said he wished to see you. He's just inside the door. If you'll rap and call to him, he'll open it."

The doubtful strangeness of the suggestion and its source would have occurred even to the innocence of the Wild Rose had the name involved been any other than that of Mr. Masterson. The mention of him swallowed up her wits, and, in a fashion of love-flutter, the Wild Rose hesitated before the little door.

"Are you sure he wanted me?" she faltered.

"That's what he said," returned Sergeant King, as, standing a little to the left and rear, he drew his six-shooter from its scabbard. There would be no oratory this time; he was not to talk away another chance.

The Wild Rose tapped timidly at the door.

"Well?" cried a voice inside.

"Mr. Masterson, it's I. You said you wanted me."

The blushes of the Wild Rose were visible in the dark.

The door was locked. There was a turning of the key; the bolt was shot, and the door swung open.

"I don't understand," said Mr. Masterson, to whom the voice and words of the Wild Rose had come but faintly.

At the opening of the door Sergeant King thrust aside the Wild Rose. Next came a flash and a roar! There could be no talk of missing; the pistol was pressed against the side of Mr. Masterson. He staggered with the awful shock of it as the lead tore through his body; but he kept his feet, holding by the door.

There came a second roar, a kind of double roar, and this time there were two flashes instead of one. The trained senses inside the Lady Gay averred later that the space to elapse between the roar and the double roar was less than the tenth part of a second.

However brief that measure of time, it was crimson with multiplied tragedy. With the thought of defending her love, the Wild Rose, uttering a cry of horror, and clutching at the murderous pistol, threw herself between Sergeant King and Mr. Masterson. She was a breath too late for the first; the second, meant also for her idol, drove its way into her young breast. The Wild Rose fell; at her side fell Sergeant King, snuffed out by the unfailing six-shooter of Mr. Masterson.

Hard hit as he was, Mr. Masterson raised the Wild Rose in his arms. She opened her brown eyes, swimming with love.

“He said you wanted me,” whispered the Wild Rose.

Mr. Masterson, looking into the soft depths, saw that love and knew it for his own. Even as he gazed, the warm lights failed and faded; the rose flush deserted the cheek. In the arms of Mr. Masterson the Wild Rose lay dead.

CHAPTER V.

THE STRATEGY OF MR. MASTERSON.

THIS came long after the battle at the 'Dobe Walls, and was of the year next before Dull Knife, that Red Richard of the Cheyennes, with one hundred and forty-eight followers, two-thirds of whom were squaws and papposes, broke from the soldiers and fought his way to his old home in the North, whipping the cavalry once, twice, thrice; yielding only and at last to the lying treachery of Red Cloud and his Sioux police. It was a great trail that last long running fight of Dull Knife, and proved his heart good and his "medicine" strong. Some one some day ought to write the story high among the gallant deeds of men. However, here is not the place nor this the time; for what comes after is to be a tale of stratagem, not battle; politics, not war.

Commonly the face of Dodge was as open and frank and care-free as the face of a Waterbury watch. On the occasion in hand it wore a look of occupation and serious

business. This business expression was fairly founded; a sheriff for Ford County must be selected, the gentleman who had filled that post of trust being undeniably dead.

The passing of that sheriff was curious. One morning he rode forth, and fording the Arkansas at the Cimarron Crossing, made south and west for Sand Creek. And thereafter he never rode back. It was understood that he bore official papers to serve upon a certain miscreant who dwelt on Sand Creek. The Sand Creek miscreant having bought goods of Mr. Wright, later jeered at the suggestion that he pay, and Mr. Wright had been driven to ask aid of the law.

Three days after the sheriff splashed through the Cimarron Crossing his pony was picked up by cow people, saddled, bridled, and in the best of spirits, close by the river where the lush grass grows most to a pony's taste. It did not escape experienced eyes that, when the pony was thus recovered, the bridle reins were properly upon its neck and had not been lifted over its head, to hang by the bits and drag about its hoofs. Later, the missing one's six-shooter and belt, the latter tooth-marked, together with shreds of clothing, scraps of leather leggings, and sundry bones gnawed white, were found an hour's ride out on the trail. The pistol possessed a full furnishment of six unexploded car-

tridges. Also, the tooth-marked belt and those fragmentary reminders, scattered here and there and all about for the round area of a mile, offered much to support a belief that the late officer, in his final expression, had become of gustatory moment to coyotes, which grey beggarmen of the plains were many and hungry in those parts.

When the evidence recounted was all in, the wisdom of Dodge made divers deductions. These found setting forth in the remarks of Mr. Wright, the same being delivered to Mr. Short and others in the Long Branch saloon.

“Those bridle reins on the pony’s neck,” observed Mr. Wright, inspired to the explanation by Old Jordan and a local curiosity which appealed to him as among the best intelligences in camp, “those bridle reins on the pony’s neck shows that Dave went out o’ the saddle a heap sudden. If Dave had swung to the grass of his own will he’d have lifted the reins over the pony’s head, so’s to keep that equine standin’ patient to his call.”

“Don’t you reckon, Bob,” broke in Mr. Short, “your Sand Creek bankrupt bushwhacks Dave?”

“No; Dave wasn’t shot out o’ the saddle, the six loads in his gun bein’ plenty on that point. It’s preposterous that an old hand like Dave, in an open country, too, could have been rubbed out, an’ never get a shot. Dave wasn’t

that easy. Besides, if the Sand Creek hold-up had bumped Dave off, he'd have cinched the pony. Gents, the idea I entertain is that Dave, in a fit of abstraction, permits himself to be bucked off. Landin' on his head that a-way, his neck naturally gets broke."

The Wright theory having been adopted, Dodge, in addition to the serious business look, took on an atmosphere of disappointment which trenched upon the mournful. Not that the late sheriff's death preyed upon Dodge. Dodge was aware of sheriffs in their evanescence. They were as grass; they came up like the flowers to be cut down. What discouraged Dodge was the commonplace character of that officer's exit, as so convincingly explained by Mr. Wright. Nothing had been left wherewith to gild a story and tantalize the envious ears of rivalry. To be chucked from a careless saddle to the dislocation of an equally careless neck was not a proud demise.

By Western tenets the only honourable departure would have been the one usual and official. The sheriff who would quit his constituents under noblest conditions must perish in the smoke of conflict, defending communal order and the threatened peace of men. Obviously he must not be pitched from his own pony to fatten coyotes.

"For," as Cimarron Bill was moved to observe, "to

be bucked into a better life, inadvertent, is as onromatic as bein' kicked to glory by an ambulance mule."

Had the late sheriff gone down before the lawless muzzle of some desperate personage, bent, as runs the phrase, on "standing Dodge on its head," what exhilarating ceremonies would have been the fruit! The desperate personage, on the hocks of that snuffing out, would have been earnestly lynched. The slain sheriff, his head pillowed in his saddle, his guns by his side, would have lain in state. Dodge, crape on its sombrero and with bowed head, would have followed the catafalque, while a brass band boomed the dead march; the rites, conducted in a mood of gloomy elevation, would have aroused the admiration of an entire border. All these good advantages were denied Dodge, and it was that funeral loss which clouded the public brow. The possibilities would now be exhausted when the fate of the once sheriff was officially noticed, and the vacancy thus arranged had been filled.

And now a new sheriff must be chosen. Dodge, politically speaking, was all there was of Ford County. Politics, in the sinister sense of party, had never reared its viper head in Dodge; there existed no such commodity of misrule. Also, the station of sheriff was of responsible gravity. Thus, indeed, thought Dodge; and went upon that sheriff-mongering with care.

“My idea of a sheriff,” vouchsafed Mr. Short, “is one who, while he does not wear his six-shooters for ornament, can be relied on not to go shootin’ too promiscuous. The prosperity of Dodge swings and rattles on the boys who drive the herds. It isn’t commercially expedient to put a crimp in one of ’em for trivial cause. Of course, should the most free-handed consumer that ever tossed his *dinero* across a counter pull his hardware for blood, it is obvious that he must be downed. The demand of the hour is for a sheriff who can discriminate on the lines I’ve laid down.”

This and more was said. When discussion had been exhausted Mr. Trask, with a view of focussing suggestion, advanced the name of Mr. Masterson. Mr. Wright, as well as Mr. Short, was prompt with his support.

“For,” said Mr. Wright, “where can you find a cooler head or a quicker gun than Bat’s?”

“But Bat ain’t here none,” explained Cimarron Bill. “He’s down on the Medicine Lodge, killin’ buffalo; his camp’s in Walker’s Timber.”

It was apparent that the better element, that is to say, the better shots, favoured Mr. Masterson. An informal count displayed among his supporters such popular towers as Mr. Wright, Mr. Trask, Mr. Short, and Mr. Kelly. Mr. Short was emphatic in his partisanship.

“Not only,” explained Mr. Short, “is Bat cool an’

steady, but, bar Mike Sutton, he's the best educated sharp in Dodge."

Cimarron Bill, who seemed born to ride bad ponies, saddled a bronco whose studied villainy of disposition was half atoned for by an ability to put one hundred miles between himself and his last feed. Cimarron Bill had been directed to bring in Mr. Masterson.

"An' don't tell him what's in the wind," warned Mr. Wright. "Bat's modest, an' if you spring this on him plumb abrupt it might shock him so he wouldn't come."

"What'll I tell him, then?" demanded Cimarron Bill. "I shore can't rope up Bat without a word an' drag him yere with my pony."

"Here's what you do," said Mr. Short. "Tell him I'm goin' to run, with Updegraffe up for the opp'sition. Tell him that Walker of the Cross K, an' B'ar Creek Johnson are ag'in me. That would fetch Bat from the Rio Grande."

On the south bank of the Medicine Lodge was a horse-shoe bend, and the enclosed forty acres, thick-sown of trees, were known as Walker's Timber. Here was pitched the buffalo camp of Mr. Masterson, and therefrom, aided and abetted by his brother Ed and Mr. Tighlman, he issued forth against the buffaloes, slaying

them serenely, to his profit and the fullfed joy of sundry coyotes and ravens that attended faithfully his hunting.

It was in the earlier darkness of the evening, and Mr. Masterson was sitting by his campfire, peering into a little memorandum book by the dancing light of the flames. In this book, with a stubby pencil, he soberly jotted down a record of the day's kill.

"We've made eight hundred and thirty-three robes, Billy," observed Mr. Masterson to Mr. Tighlman, who was busy over a bake-kettle containing all that was mortal of two hen turkeys—wild and young and lively the night before. "And." concluded Mr. Masterson, with just a shade of pride in his tones, "I fetched them with precisely eight hundred and thirty-three cartridges, the nearest bull four hundred yards away."

Mr. Tighlman grunted applause of the rifle accuracy of Mr. Masterson. Mr. Tighlman was the camp's cook, having a mysterious genius for biscuits, and knowing to a pinch what baking-powder was required for a best biscuit result.

Mr. Tighlman presently announced supper by beating the side of the bake-kettle with the back of a butcher-knife. The challenge brought Ed Masterson from the drying-grounds, where he had been staking out and scraping, with an instrument that resembled a short-

handled adz, the fresh hides of that day's hunt. Mr. Masterson put away his roster of buffalo dead and made ready to compliment Mr. Tighlman in the way in which cooks like best to be praised.

Suddenly there came a sound as of some one crossing the little river. Each of the three seized his rifle and rolled outside the circle of firelight. It was as one hundred to one there abode no danger; the Cheyennes had not yet recovered from the calmative influences of the Black Kettle war. Still, it was the careful practice of the plains to distrust all things after dark.

"Go back to your fire," shouted a voice from out the shadows. "Do you-all prairie dogs reckon that, if I was goin' to jump your camp, I'd come walloppin' across in this egregious style?"

"It's Cimarron Bill," exclaimed Mr. Masterson, discarding his rifle in favour of renewed turkey.

Cimarron Bill tore the saddle off the malevolent bronco and hobbled him.

"Whoopee!" he shouted softly, as he pushed in by the fire and pulled the bake-kettle towards him; "I'm hungry enough to eat a saddle cover."

Cimarron Bill, being exhaustively fed, laid forth his mission mendaciously. He related the vacancy in the office of sheriff, and said that it was proposed to fill the same with Mr. Short. Cimarron Bill, seeing a chance

to tell a little truth, explained that the opposition would put up Mr. Updegraffe.

“Who’s behind Updegraffe?” asked Mr. Masterson.

The veracious Cimarron Bill enumerated Mr. Webster of the Alamo, Mr. Peacock of the Dance Hall, Mr. Walker of the Cross-K, and Bear Creek Johnson.

This set Mr. Masterson on edge.

“We’ll start by sun-up,” quoth Mr. Masterson. “Ed and Billy can pick up the camp.”

When Mr. Masterson discovered how he had been defrauded into Dodge, and learned of those honours designed for him, his modesty took alarm.

“I didn’t think, Cimarron,” said Mr. Masterson, in tones of reproach, “that you’d cap me up against a game like this!” Then he refused squarely to consider himself a candidate.

“But it’s too late, Bat,” explained Mr. Short. “You’ve already been in the field two days, with Updegraffe in opposition. If you refuse to run they’ll say you crawled.”

Mr. Short spoke with sly triumph, for it was his chicane which had announced Mr. Masterson as a candidate. He had foreseen its value as an argument.

The sagacity of Mr. Short was justified; Mr. Master-

son was plainly staggered. His name had been used; his opponent was in the field; Mr. Masterson could find no avenue of retreat. It was settled; Mr. Masterson must be a candidate for sheriff of Ford.

The great contest of Masterson against Updegraffe had occupied the public four days when Mr. Peacock, Mr. Webster and Mr. Walker, acting for Mr. Updegraffe, waited upon Mr. Wright, Mr. Kelly and Mr. Short, who received them on behalf of Mr. Masterson. Mr. Peacock, for the Updegraffe three, made primary explanation. He and his fellow commissioners had observed a falling off in trade. The Alamo was not taking in one-half its normal profits; the same was true of the Dance Hall. The Updegraffe committee asked Mr. Short if an abatement of prosperity had not occurred at the Long Branch, and put the same question concerning the Alhambra to Mr. Kelly. Mr. Kelly and Mr. Short, being appealed to, confessed a business slackness.

“But you know,” observed Mr. Kelly, philosophically, “how it is in business; it’s a case of come-an’-go, like the old woman’s soap.”

Mr. Webster believed the falling off due to an election interest which engulfed the souls of folk.

“It takes their minds off such amusements as roulette an’ farobank an’ rum,” explained Mr. Webster. “Be-

sides, the people of Dodge are a mighty cautious outfit. Dodge won't take chances; an' at a ticklish time like this Dodge sobers up."

"There may be something in that," mused Mr. Short. "But, coming down to the turn, what was it you jack-rabbits wanted to say?"

"This is the proposition," said Mr. Webster, "an' we make it for the purpose of gettin' the racket over without delay. Our idea is to set the time for a week from now, round up the votin' population in the Plaza, say at eight o'clock in the evenin', an' count noses, Master-son ag'in Updegraffe, high man win. That's the offer we make. You gents will need an hour to look it over, an' we'll return at the end of that time an' get your answer."

"How do you figure this?" asked Mr. Wright of his fellow committeemen when the Updegraffe delegation had departed. "Is it a deadfall?"

"Strange as it may sound," responded Mr. Short, "considerin' what liars that outfit is, I'm obliged to admit that for once they're on the squar'."

Mr. Kelly coincided with Mr. Short, and it was finally agreed that the proffer of the Updegraffe contingent should be accepted.

"We're with you," said Mr. Short when Mr. Webster and the others returned, "but not on selfish grounds.

We base our action on the bluff that the peace of Dodge requires protection, an' that the office of sheriff, now vacant, should be promptly filled."

"Then the election is settled," said Mr. Webster, who was a practical man, "for eight o'clock in the evenin', one week from to-day, to be pulled off in the Plaza?"

"That's the caper," retorted Mr. Short, and the commissions adjourned.

The canvass went forward in lively vein, albeit, as Mr. Webster had complained, there was a notable falling away in the local appetite for rum. Plainly, Dodge had turned wary in a day that wore a six-shooter, and under circumstances which tested the tempers of men. Evidently, it had determined that while this election crisis lasted, its hand should remain steady and its head cool.

It was five days before the one appointed for, as Mr. Webster called it, "a count of noses" in the Plaza. The friends of Mr. Masterson developed an irritating fact. There were, man added to man, four hundred and twelve votes in Dodge; of these a careful canvass betrayed two hundred and twelve as being for Mr. Updegraffe—a round majority of twelve.

This disquieting popular condition was chiefly the work of Bear Creek Johnson. The malign influence of that disreputable person controlled full forty votes,

being the baser spirits; and these now threatened the defeat of Mr. Masterson.

Cimarron Bill, when he grasped the truth, was for cleansing Dodge of Bear Creek with a Colt's-45. These sanitary steps, however, were forbidden by Mr. Masterson; at that the worthy Cimarron tendered a compromise. He would agree to do no more than mildly wing the offensive Bear Creek.

"No," said Mr. Masterson, "don't lay hand to gun. I'm not going to have Abilene and Hays pointing fingers of scorn at Dodge as being unable to elect a peace officer of the county without somebody getting shot. Besides, it isn't necessary; I'll beat 'em by strategy."

Cimarron Bill, withheld from that direct aid to Mr. Masterson which his simple nature suggested, groaned in his soul. Observing his grief, Mr. Masterson detailed Mr. Tighlman to be ever at Cimarron Bill's elbow, ready to repress that volatile recruit in case his feelings got beyond control and sought relief in some sudden bombardment of the felon Bear Creek.

That profligate, thus protected, pursued his election efforts in behalf of Mr. Updegraffe cunningly, being all unchecked. His methods were not unmarked of talent; this should be a specimen:

"What party be you for?" Bear Creek demanded of an Ishmael who lived precariously by chuck-a-luck. The

one addressed was of so low a caste that he would accept a wager of ten cents. This put him beneath the notice of such as Mr. Short, whose limit was one hundred and two hundred, and in whose temple of fortune, the Long Branch, white chips were rated at fifty dollars a stack. "Which is it? Masterson or Updegraffe?"

"Well," returned the Ishmael of chuck-a-luck, doubtfully, "I sort o' allow that Bat Masterson's the best man."

"You do!" retorted the abandoned Bear Creek, disgustedly. "Now listen to me. What does a ten-cent hold-up like you want of the best man? You want the worst man, an' so I tell you! Make it Updegraffe," concluded Bear Creek, convincingly, "an' you stay in Dodge. Make it Masterson, an' he'll make you an' every other tinhorn hard to find."

It was in that fashion the industrious Bear Creek piled up the majority of twelve. Unless something was done Mr. Masterson would sup disaster, and even the conservative Mr. Kelly whispered that he really thought the plan of Cimarron Bill, for the abatement of Bear Creek, possessed a merit.

"Let me think this over a bit," said Mr. Masterson to Mr. Kelly.

That night Mr. Masterson met Mr. Kelly, Mr. Wright and Mr. Short at the Long Branch and laid bare

a plan. Its simplicity impressed Mr. Masterson's hearers; Mr. Wright even waxed enthusiastic.

"It'll win!" he cried, smiting the poker table about which the four were gathered.

"It shore looks it," coincided Mr. Short. "In any event we lose nothin'; we can always fall back on the guns."

At the latter intimation Mr. Kelly nodded solemnly. While not mercurial, Mr. Kelly was in many of his characteristics one with Cimarron Bill. There were questions over which their honest natures met and sympathised.

Acting on the plan of Mr. Masterson, Mr. Wright and Mr. Short and Mr. Kelly craved in their turn a conference with the Updegraffe three.

"It is this, gents, that troubles us," began Mr. Wright, when the committees found themselves together for the second time. "There are hot and headlong sports on our side as there are on yours. If we convene in the Plaza, as we've arranged, there'll be bloodshed. I'm afraid we couldn't restrain some of the more violent among us; indeed, to be entirely frank, I'm afraid I couldn't even restrain myself. And yet, there's a way, gents, in which danger may be avoided. Let us abandon that clause which provides for a count of noses in the Plaza. The end in view can be attained by having it understood that

at eight o'clock the Masterson forces are to rally in the Long Branch, and the Updegraffe people in Mr. Peacock's Dance Hall. Thus the two sides may be counted separately and the chance of deadly collision eliminated. We will set our watches together so that the count shall occur at eight o'clock sharp. Mr. Kelly for our side will be at the Dance Hall to act with Mr. Peacock in a count of the Undegraffe votes, while Mr. Webster for your interests is welcome to come to the Long Branch to aid Mr. Short in a round-up of the strength of Mr. Masterson. The two forces being out of gunshot of each other, the attendance will be freer and more untrammelled. Following the count Mr. Short and Mr. Kelly, Mr. Webster and Mr. Peacock will come together and declare the result. There of course will be no appeal, unless those appealing aim at civil war."

As Mr. Wright talked on, suavely, smoothly, laying down each feature of his design, a slow look of relief stole into the faces of Mr. Webster and Mr. Peacock. Even the more hardy features of Mr. Walker were not untouched.

There had been doubts tugging at the Updegraffe three. True, the majority of twelve was theirs, but the weight of valour stood overwhelmingly with Mr. Masterson. The offer of a safe separation of forces was a relief, and Mr. Peacock, Mr. Walker and Mr. Webster

lost no time in accepting. Notices were posted proclaiming an election after the scheme laid down by Mr. Wright.

It was election night; only the enterprising and those with votes and guns were abroad in Dodge. The rival clans of Masterson and Updegraffe began to gather, respectively, at the Long Branch and the Dance Hall. There was never a ripple of disorder; nothing could be finer than that peace which was. Ten minutes before eight o'clock, the hour fixed for the count, the strength of each had convened.

The Updegraffe people were jubilant; every man belonging to them being in the Dance Hall, that majority of twelve was sure. The minutes went ticking themselves into eternity, and the watches of Mr. Kelly and Mr. Peacock registered one minute before eight. In sixty seconds the count in the Dance Hall would take place.

At the Long Branch, where the followers of Mr. Masterson filled the rooms, conditions were much the same. There Mr. Webster and Mr. Short would make the tally. Watch in hand they stood waiting for the moment.

It was at this crisis that Mr. Tighlman pulled his pistol and fired through the Long Branch floor. The report was as a joyful signal. Instantly one hundred

shots rang out. Indeed, it was a noble din! The room filled with smoke; excitement mounted! Cimarron Bill, a six-shooter in each faithful hand, was in the midst of the hubbub, blazing like a piece of fireworks, whooping like a Comanche.

The night breeze carried the stirring story of riot and uproar to the waiting multitude in the Dance Hall. Those waiting ones looked first their amazement, then their delight. As by one impulse they tore through the door and made, hotfoot, for the Long Branch. By conservative estimates, founded upon the whole number of shots, there should be at least five dead and fifteen wounded.

As the advance guard arrived at the Long Branch they found Mr. Short outside.

“Bat’s downed Bob Wright,” remarked Mr. Short; “plugged him plumb centre.”

Inside went the hilarious Dance Hallers. The astute Mr. Short followed, closed the door and set his back against it.

“It’s eight o’clock, Mr. Webster,” remarked Mr. Short. “We must begin to count.” It was observable that in the hand that did not hold the watch Mr. Short held a six-shooter.

Mr. Webster was in a flutter of nerves; he had been the only one in the Long Branch who did not understand

and had not anticipated those frantic excesses of Mr. Tighlman, Cimarron Bill and others of that heroic firing party. Mr. Webster was in no wise clear as to what had happened. Borne upon by a feeling of something wrong he made a protest.

“Stop!” he cried, “there’s a lot of Updegraffe men in here.”

“No, sir,” responded Mr. Short, coldly, while a gray glimmer, a kind of danger signal it was, began to show in his eye. “Every gent inside the Long Branch is for Bat Masterson or he wouldn’t be here. Also, to suggest fraud,” concluded Mr. Short, as Mr. Webster seemed about to speak, “would be an attack upon my honour, me ownin’ the joint.”

Now the honour of Mr. Short, next to Mr. Short’s six-shooter, was the most feverish thing in Dodge. The mere mention of it sent a shiver through Mr. Webster. Without parley he surrendered tamely, and the count at the Long Branch began. The total proved satisfactory; the returns gave Mr. Masterson two hundred and sixty votes.

“Let us go over to the Dance Hall,” said Mr. Wright, “and see what Kell and Peacock have to report.”

They were saved the journey; Mr. Kelly and Mr. Peacock, the latter bewildered and fear-ridden in the face of the unknown, just then came into the Long Branch.

"Only thirty-three for Updegraffe," said Mr. Kelly. "That's correct, ain't it, Peacock?"

Mr. Peacock gasped, but seemed to nod assent.

"Mr. Masterson, it would appear, is elected," observed Mr. Wright, benignantly, "by a majority of two hundred and twenty-seven. It is a tribute to his popularity. The whole vote, however, is much smaller than I looked for," and Mr. Wright beamed.

"I think," said Mr. Kelly, judgmatically, "that thar's a passel of Updegraffe people stampedin' about the streets. But, of course, since they weren't in the Dance Hall, me an' Peacock had no authority to incloode 'em; did we, Peacock?"

Mr. Peacock mopped his moonlike countenance and shook his head in forlornest fashion. He was too much cast down to oppose the word of Mr. Kelly.

Bear Creek Johnson, eye aflame, a-bristle for trouble, pushed through. Cimarron Bill, who was the soul of business at a time like this, met the outraged Bear Creek in the door.

"Whatever do you reckon you're after?" queried Cimarron Bill, maintaining the while a dangerous eye.

Bear Creek Johnson surveyed Cimarron Bill, running him up and down with an uneasy, prudent glance. He smelled disaster off him as folk smell fire in a house.

"Me?" he returned, mildly. "Which I simply comes

pirootin' over to move we make the 'lection of Bat Masterson yoonanimous."

Thus did the *ruse de guerre* of Mr. Masterson result in victory; thus was he made sheriff of Ford.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FATAL GRATITUDE OF MR. KELLY.

IT was at the election following the one which made Mr. Masterson sheriff of Ford County that Mr. Kelly, proprietor of the Alhambra, became mayor of Dodge. Mr. Masterson, aside from being a natural captain of men, had had his genius for strategy ripened as a scout-pupil of the great Ben Clark during the Cheyenne wars, and on this ballot occasion contributed deeply to the victory of Mr. Kelly. Mr. Masterson came forward and withstood certain Mexicans, who otherwise would have exercised the ballot to Mr. Kelly's disadvantage. The Mexicans belonged with the Cross-K brand, which had its range across the river; and since Mr. Walker, proprietor of the Cross-K, was an enemy of Mr. Kelly, they were rightfully regarded by Mr. Masterson as tools of the opposition.

Mr. Masterson urged, and with justice, that an extension of the franchise to Mexicans would be subversive

of good morals, and offensive to the purer sentiment of Dodge.

“This is, or should be,” said Mr. Masterson, “a white man’s government, and how long, I ask, will it survive if Mexicans be permitted a voice in its affairs? If we are going to take the limit off in this ridiculous fashion we might as well send for Bear Shield’s band of Cheyennes and tell them to get into the game. To grant Mexicans the right to vote is to make preposterous that freedom for which our fathers fought and bled and died, and should republican institutions be thus trailed in the dust, I see nothing for it but an appeal to arms.”

This long speech was made to the judges of election, who were fair men and friends of Mr. Kelly. There were ten of the Mexicans and the contest was close; the judges remembered these things, and the position taken by Mr. Masterson, in defence of an unsullied suffrage, was sustained.

“It wasn’t worth a battle,” explained Mr. Walker in later comment on Mr. Masterson’s oration, “or I might have called that bluff of Bat’s about an appeal to arms.”

When Mr. Kelly was inaugurated in the discharge of his high trust, his earliest feeling was one of favour to Mr. Masterson; for his majority had been but five, and Mr. Kelly was a grateful man. The situation at a first blink baffled the friendship of Mr. Kelly. What could

he do for Mr. Masterson? The latter, as sheriff of Ford, already held an office superior even to that of Mr. Kelly's. Clearly, Mr. Masterson was beyond and above the touch of his gratitude, and though it stood on tiptoe; he must sit down and suffer a sense of obligation which he could not discharge. These truths came home to him after hours of profound thought, and he sighed as he reflected on his helplessness.

But Mr. Kelly was enterprising, and gratitude is as apt as necessity itself to sharpen the edge of invention. That debt he owed Mr. Masterson had not borne upon him two days before he began to see a way in which he might return the other's friendly deeds upon his head. As mayor Mr. Kelly, under the State law just passed, could construct the post of marshal. The town had never had such an officer. Thus far it had needed none; Mr. Masterson, in his good-natured way, had stepped outside the strict duties of his place as sheriff and, without money and without price, acted the part of marshal. In the latter rôle, as honourable as it was perilous, Mr. Masterson's six-shooters were already looked upon by Dodge as the local paladium.

Mr. Kelly, mayor, decided that he would create the post of marshal at a round stipend to him who should hold it. Also, he would name as such functionary Mr. Masterson's brother Ed. When Mr. Kelly had completed

this plan he rewarded himself with four fingers of Old Jordan; a glow overspread his countenance as he considered that he might thus requite the generous interference of Mr. Masterson concerning those Cross-K Mexicans, who, if their pernicious purpose had not been frustrated, would have defeated him of his mayoralty.

Mr. Masterson was not in Dodge when this kindly resolution was reached by Mr. Kelly, being over on Crooked Creek in quest of stolen mules. It thus befell that Mr. Kelly could not consult with him touching that marshalship, and the exaltation of his brother. On second thought Mr. Kelly did not regret the absence of Mr. Masterson; that marshalship would be a pleasant bit of news wherewith to greet him when, weary and saddle-worn, he rode in with those lost mules and the scalp of that criminal who had cut their hobbles and feloniously taken them to himself.

Still, Mr. Kelly would seek advice; this was only caution, for the jealous West is prone to resent a novelty in its destinies which descends upon it as a surprise. The word, therefore, was sent throughout Dodge by our careful magistrate that he meditated a marshal, with Ed Masterson as the man.

Mr. Wright approved the scheme; likewise did Mr. Short and Mr. Trask. Mr. Webster and Mr. Peacock were understood to disparage the design. As for Mr.

Walker of the Cross-K, his condemnation became open and he was heard to loudly proclaim it to Mr. Webster across the Alamo bar.

"And," concluded the bitter Mr. Walker, replacing his empty glass on the counter, "if the Masterson family is goin' to be sawed onto this community in a body, I for one am ready to pull my freight."

"Well," casually observed Mr. Short, who had dropped in from the Long Branch to note how a rival trade progressed, "I've always held that pullin' your freight was safer than pullin' your gun."

"Perhaps I'll pull both," retorted Mr. Walker.

Mr. Walker, however, did not press the conversation to extremes. Mr. Short was a warm adherent of Mr. Masterson; moreover, he had killed a gentleman in Tombstone for merely claiming the privilege of counting the cards. True, that person of inquiring mind had set forth his desire for information with a six-shooter, and as Mr. Short was back of the box at the time, and the bullets were addressed to him personally, his retort was upheld by all impartial men. None the less, the ready completeness of the reply made for the dignity and western standing of Mr. Short, and Mr. Walker, who knew the story, felt no ambition to go with him to the bottom of Mr. Kelly's new policy of a marshal.

When Mr. Kelly heard how Mr. Wright and Mr.

Short and Mr. Trask applauded, he said that the affair was settled; those gentlemen were his friends. Messrs. Walker and Webster and Peacock were of the opposition, and Mr. Kelly was too good an executive to listen to his enemies. He would name Ed Masterson marshal; in order that Mr. Masterson might witness his brother's elevation he would defer it as a ceremony until Mr. Masterson's return.

It was four days later when Mr. Masterson came in with those wandering mules and the particulars concerning the last moments of the bandit that stole them, and who had opposed a Winchester to Mr. Masterson in the discharge of his duty. Following his return Mr. Masterson strode into the Alhambra with the purpose of restoring himself and conquering a fatigue incident to his labours. It was then that Mr. Kelly laid open those changes contemplated in the official list of Dodge, which were to work advantage for his brother. To his amazement Mr. Masterson, on receipt of the information, became the picture of dismay.

"Why, Bat," exclaimed Mr. Kelly, alarmed by Mr. Masterson's evident disturbance, "ain't the idee all right?"

"Worst in the world," groaned Mr. Masterson. "Has Ed heard?"

"Shore," replied Mr. Kelly; "I nacherally told him the

first flash out o' the box. Bob Wright says it's a beautiful scheme; so does Short."

"I know, Kell," said Mr. Masterson, wearily, "and no doubt Bob and Luke believe it's the thing to do. But they don't know Ed; he's no more fit to be marshal than I am to join the church."

"Oh come, Bat," cried Mr. Kelly, evincing a critical disbelief, "no gamer hand than Ed ever buckled on a gun!"

"That's it," returned Mr. Masterson, "Ed's too game. He's so game it obscures his judgment. Those outlaws from below will study him, and in the wind-up they'll outwit him. If you make Ed marshal he won't last the year. Some of those murderers will get him sure."

"I can't understand, Bat; you told me yourself that when you an' Ed was killin' buffalo down on the Canadian for Billy Dixon, Ed was the best shot that ever went on the range; an' the quickest."

"Quick and as dead to centres with either a Sharp's or a Colt's as you could put your finger. There's no discount on Ed's gun play, and so I tell you now. The trouble lies inside Ed; he's too easy, too ready for a talk. And he can't read his man. Indians and Mexicans? yes; I'd trust Ed to take a six-shooter and report favourably on twenty of 'em at a clatter. But a white man is too cunning; those Texas killers that come over

the Jones and Plummer trail will throw him off his guard. There's the loose screw, he's guileless; if it's a case of white man, he doesn't know when to shoot. As I tell you, make Ed marshal, and he'll never see another summer."

"But what can I do? I've already told him."

"Yes," returned Mr. Masterson with a sigh, "and he's as obstinate as a badger. You've got the notion planted in Ed's head, and you couldn't shoot it out with a buffalo gun! The way you've put the cards in the box, Kell, there's nothing to do but appoint him. I can see the finish, though!"

Within the fortnight following Mr. Kelly's investment of Ed Masterson with authority as Marshal of Dodge there arose an incident which went far to uphold the fears of Mr. Masterson. It was made plain, even to the dullest, that Marshal Ed was too thoughtless to secure a best and, for himself, a safest result in the discharge of his official duties.

The proof came in the broad glare of an afternoon, when the unblinking sun was still four hours high. A lonesome stranger had sought the Dance Hall; finding that theatre of mirth deserted, the desolation of the place weighed heavily upon him.

Smitten of the hope of adding vivacity to the scene and rendering it more cheerful, the lonesome stranger

pulled his pistol and shot into the upright piano which reposed at the far end of the room. The lonesome stranger put three bullets through and through the instrument; and, as each cut a string, the deficiencies thus arranged were found later to mar the production of those gallops and quicksteps and mazurkas upon which Dodge depended in hours of revelry.

Mr. Peacock, who took to the sidewalk when the lonesome stranger produced his pistol, called aloud upon Marshal Ed for aid. That officer responded, and stepped into the Dance Hall just as the lonesome one fired the third shot.

“Here, here!” exclaimed Marshal Ed, his thumbs jauntily in his belt, and never a move toward his weapon, “here, you horse-thief! what do you figure now you’re doing?”

By way of reply the lonesome one sent the fourth bullet into the left shoulder of Marshal Ed. The latter, upon this hint, got his own artillery to bear and, while the shot in his shoulder knocked him off his feet, the lonesome one also went to the floor with a bullet in his hip.

Marshal Ed was up in a flash; the lonesome one was making an effort to rise. At this, Marshal Ed fell upon him in the most unofficial spirit and beat him with his pistol. When Mr. Masterson came upon the field his lively relative, weapon back in its scabbard, was sur-

veying the lonesome one where he lay bleeding on the floor.

“Two of you pack that party to the doctor,” quoth Marshal Ed, addressing the concourse of citizens that arrived with Mr. Masterson. Then, in reply to the latter’s inquiry: “No, he didn’t do anything in particular; he was simply shaking up the joint, I reckon, under the head of good of the order.”

Nothing could exceed the indignation of Mr. Masterson when, fifteen minutes later, he learned of the bullet in Marshal Ed’s shoulder. It was then that the outrageous scandal of it began to break upon him.

“You find a bandit shooting up the Dance Hall,” cried the discouraged Mr. Masterson, “and all you do is enter into conversation with him! Then, when he’s plugged you, and you on your side have dropped him with a bullet in his leg, you beat him over the head!—him, with two cartridges left in his gun! What do you reckon those other five shots were put in your own six-shooter for? And you call yourself Marshal of Dodge!”

The doctor, having repaired the lonesome one, began a hunt for the bullet in Marshal Ed’s shoulder, while Mr. Masterson, after freeing his mind as recorded, retired to the Long Branch to hide his chagrin.

“Ed’s new to the game, Bat,” observed Mr. Short, as he joined his depressed friend at the bar. “Give him

time; he'll make the round-up all right. What he went ag'inst to-day will be proper practice for him."

"It won't do, Luke," responded Mr. Masterson, hopelessly, "Ed never'll last to go the route. Did you ever hear of such a thing? A party has plugged him, and lies there organised with two more loads. Ed, with five shots in his gun, can't think of anything better to do than beat him over the head. If I wasn't so worried I'd feel ashamed."

Dating from that uprising of the lonesome stranger there befell a season of serenity, the peace whereof was without its fellow in the memory of Dodge. The giddy and the careless paid no heed, but pessimists and ones grown old on the sunset side of the Missouri took on brows of trouble. The latter, counting on that inevitable equilibrium which nature everywhere and under all conditions maintains, looked forward to an era of extraordinary explosiveness, when bullets would fly as thick as plover in the fall. These folk of forecast could not tell when this powder-burning would take place, but they felt that it was on its smoky way.

True, that period of deep quiet was occasionally rippled by some tenderfoot who, made foolish of whiskey and the liberal lines laid down by Dodge for the guidance of visitors, was inclined to go too far. Or now and again a Mexican became boisterous beyond what a judi-

cious public sentiment permitted to his caste, and offered a case where the dignity of Dodge required that he be moderately "buffaloed." These slight ebullitions, however, were as nothings, and came under the caption of child's play. It was not until the taking place of what stirring events are to be recounted that those pessimists and ones of prophecy, being justified of their fears, gathered at the Long Branch, the Alhambra and the Alamo, and over their liquor reminded one another how they had foretold the same.

It was brown October; the fat beef herds came winding in from the lowing, horn-tossing south, and Dodge in its shirtsleeves was busy with prosperity. The genial boys of cows, their herds disposed of, were eager to dispense their impartial riches upon monte, whiskey and quadrilles, and it was the chosen duty of Dodge to provide those relaxations.

On the fateful day which this history has in mind, Mr. Walker of the Cross-K brought in a bunch of nine hundred steers. They came trooping and bellowing through the Arkansas with the first dull lights of morning, and, before Dodge sat down to its prandial meal—which with a simplicity inherited of the fathers it took at noon—had been turned over to certain purchasing gentlemen from the East, for whom they had been gathered. Their task performed, the weary riders who brought

them up the trail gave themselves freely to those metropolitan delights which Dodge arranged for them. They went about with liberal hands, and Dodge rejoiced in profits staggering.

Among those who rode in with the Cross-K herd was Mr. Wagner. In moments of sobriety no danger had its source in Mr. Wagner. Endowed of strong drink and a Colt's pistol in right proportions, he was worth the watching. Indeed, within the year Mr. Wagner, while thus equipped, had shot himself into such disrepute in the streets of Mobeetie that he defeated a popular wish to hang him only by the fleetness of his pony. It was then he came north and attached himself to Mr. Walker and the Cross-K.

Throughout those daylight hours which fell in between that transfer of the Cross-K herd and the lighting of what kerosene lamps made gay the barrooms of Dodge, nothing could have been more commendable than the deportment of Mr. Wagner. He imbibed his whiskey at intervals not too brief, and distributed his custom with an equal justice between the Alhambra with Mr. Kelly, the Alamo with Mr. Webster, and the Long Branch with Mr. Short. Also, he drifted into the outfitting bazaar of Mr. Wright and spent fifty dollars upon an eight-inch Colt's six-shooter, calibre-45, the butt of which was enriched and made graceful with carved ivory. This fur-

niture Mr. Wagner would later swing to his hip by means of a belt, the same corrugated of cartridges.

It was not observed that his drinks had begun to tell upon Mr. Wagner invidiously until the hour of eight in the evening when, from the family circle of the Dodge Opera House, he roped the first violin of a dramatic organisation called the Red Stocking Blondes. It was during the overture that Mr. Wagner pitched the loop of his lariat into the orchestra, and as the first violin played vilely the interruption was well received by the public.

The management, however, came before the curtain and said that the show would not proceed while Mr. Wagner remained. With that, Marshal Ed led the disturber forth, took a drink with him to prove that his removal was merely formal and nothing personal meant, and bid him return no more. Mr. Wagner, acting on the suggestion of Marshal Ed, at once surrendered every scrap of interest in the drama, as expounded by the Red Stocking Blondes. It should be remembered that at this moment Mr. Wagner, in deference to the taste of Dodge, which frowned upon pistols in places of public entertainment as superfluous and vulgar, was not wearing that brand-new Colt's with the ivory butt.

It was roundly the hour of midnight, and Mr. Peacock's Dance Hall shone with the beauty and the chivalry

of Dodge. Marshal Ed had come over to the Dance Hall to hold the chivalry adverted to in decorous check and keep it to paths of peace.

Mr. Wagner arrived and took his place in a quadrille. It was observed that the belt of Mr. Wagner now upheld that Colt's pistol of the ivory butt. Aroused by this solecism, Marshal Ed descended upon Mr. Wagner and captured his unlawful embellishments. He was holding the six-shooter in one hand and Mr. Wagner in the other when Mr. Walker, sober and suave, drew near.

"If you'll give him to me, Ed," remarked Mr. Walker, "I'll take care of him."

Since the proposal provided for the peace of Dodge, Marshal Ed accepted it. He made over Mr. Wagner and the weapon of ivory butt to the soft-speaking Mr. Walker. Thereupon Mr. Walker conducted Mr. Wagner outside.

Taking Mr. Wagner to the rear of the Dance Hall, where no ear might listen and no eye look on, Mr. Walker perfidiously readorned him with that ivory-butted treasure of a Colt's-45.

"Now," observed Mr. Walker, as he buckled the belt and its dependent ordnance where they would do the most harm, "if I was you I'd go surgin' back into the Dance Hall an' if any jimcrow marshal tried to pounce on my gun I'd blow his lamp out."

Marshal Ed had emerged from the Dance Hall into the glare of light which issued from its front windows when Mr. Wagner, walking deviously, his broad-rimmed hat cocked at an insulting angle, the offensive six-shooter flapping ostentatiously against his leg, brushed by. Mr. Wagner wore a challenging glance and was snorting defiance of the law.

It was now that Marshal Ed displayed that want of caution and indifference to precedent whereof Mr. Masterson had warned Mr. Kelly. Under the conditions presented *vide licet* the sudden, not to say warlike, return of Mr. Wagner, it was officially the business of Marshal Ed to shove the muzzle of his own gun into the face of Mr. Wagner and, to quote the words of Dodge as it digged the graves next day, "stand him up." In case Mr. Wagner did not hold his hands above his head, Marshal Ed was to officially unhook his gun and put a period to Mr. Wagner's career.

So far from following this rule of conduct, Marshal Ed reached out with both hands and seized Mr. Wagner by the shoulders. Thereupon Mr. Wagner yanked the Colt's pistol of ivory butt from its scabbard; as a counter-move, Marshal Ed, while retaining a right-hand grip on Mr. Wagner's shoulder, grabbed the pistol with his left hand and held the muzzle to one side. There the two stood, Mr. Wagner powerless to bring his

weapon to bear, and Marshal Ed unable to wrest it from his grasp.

At this juncture Mr. Walker, who, in anticipation of what might occur, had privily provided himself with a pistol, came out of the darkness to the rear of the Dance Hall and thrust the weapon in the face of Marshal Ed. Mr. Walker pulled the trigger, the hammer descended, but instead of the expected report there came nothing more lethal than a sharp click. The cartridge, ashamed of the treachery in which it found itself employed, had refused to explode.

Before Mr. Walker could cock his weapon for a second trial three splitting flashes burned three holes in the night. Bang! bang! bang! The three reports were crowded as close together as the striking of a Yankee clock. Mr. Masterson, from sixty feet away, had put three bullets into Mr. Walker before the latter could fall. It was like puffing out a candle. Mr. Walker of the Cross-K was dead.

Mr. Masterson, from where he stood, would not chance a shot at Mr. Wagner; Marshal Ed was too much in the line of fire. Acting a next best part, he came up to the two on the run. But he came late. While he was still ten feet away Mr. Wagner, in the twists and turns of conflict, felt the muzzle of that new ivory-mounted Colt's pistol press for one insignificant moment against the

other's breast; he pulled the trigger and Marshal Ed fell, shot through the lungs, his clothes afire from the burning powder. As Marshal Ed went down, Mr. Wagner followed him—dead—with a bullet in his temple from the revengeful pistol of Mr. Masterson.

Mr. Wright and Mr. Short carried Marshal Ed into the Long Branch. Mr. Masterson, who with unflinching pulse had looked death in the eye a score of times, began to cry like a woman. Mr. Kelly, mayor, united his tears to Mr. Masterson's.

"It was my fault, Bat," wept Mr. Kelly; "I only wish I might have stopped that bullet myself."

"It has turned out like I told you, Kell," said Mr. Masterson; "those murderers out-managed him!"

Mr. Short reappeared and laid a sympathetic hand on Mr. Masterson's shoulder.

"Bat," said Mr. Short, "do you want to see Ed? He's dyin'; he's down to the last chip!"

"Poor Ed! No; I don't want to see him!" said Mr. Masterson, tears falling like rain.

CHAPTER VII.

WHY THE WEEKLY PLANET DIED.

THE WEEKLY PLANET, founded and edited during its brief existence by Higginson Peabody, and issued every Saturday to the hebdomadal joy of Dodge, might have flourished unto this day if it hadn't been for Jack. It was a circulation scheme proposed by Jack, and adopted by Higginson Peabody, which undid the destinies of the *Weekly Planet* to such a degree that, in the quicksands of a bottomless trouble into which they were thereby betrayed, a trouble, as Higginson Peabody averred, "so vast, that against it no human ingenuity could prevail," they bogged down and disappeared.

Not but what Jack was wholly true to the *Weekly Planet* and its fortunes. Indeed it was Jack, in his intense loyalty to the paper and those that gave it the aid and comfort of their countenance, and despite the fact that Mr. Masterson's recommendation had originally paved his way into journalism, who misled that

officer as to the flight-direction taken by Rattlesnake Sanders on the occasion of his winging Mr. Kelly. Perhaps, in defence of Jack, that episode should be briefly told.

Rattlesnake Sanders played a cold hand, being four kings and an ace, against a quartette of queens, the then armament of Mr. Kelly. Mr. Kelly pointed out the frigid character of those four kings, and thereupon Rattlesnake, in a feeling of chagrin natural to one who finds himself detected in a wrong, shot Mr. Kelly in the arm. Following this ebullition of temper, Rattlesnake mounted his pony and spurred away into the dark.

The office of the *Weekly Planet* was on the northern fringe of Dodge. It was ten o'clock of the night when Rattlesnake expressed his dissatisfaction with Mr. Kelly in manner and form set forth. The editorial and mechanical forces of the *Weekly Planet*, made up of Higginson Peabody, Jack, and a trio of printers, were hard at work at the time and knew nothing of Rattlesnake and his exploits. Indeed, the earliest word which they received of Rattlesnake was when that impulsive cowboy pulled up at their door.

The cause of Rattlesnake's pulling up was simple. When he and Mr. Kelly sat down to that friendly game, which in its finale was so disappointing, Rattlesnake, the evening being warm, had cast aside his coat and hat.

Being more or less preoccupied when ready to leave, he forgot to reassume those garments. His halt at the *Weekly Planet* was with a purpose of repairs.

Bare of head and coatless, Rattlesnake called from the saddle to Higginson Peabody. The latter, with Jack at his elbow, appeared in the door.

"Got a hat and coat you don't want?" asked Rattlesnake.

There were two six-shooters in the belt of Rattlesnake and a Winchester in its saddle-scabbard under his left leg, and it may have been this stock of ironware that awoke the generosity of Higginson Peabody. Whatever it was to move his benevolence, the truth remains that he took his own hat and coat from their peg and conferred them on Rattlesnake.

As he picked up the bridle reins to ride away Rattlesnake ran his hand into his pocket.

"What's the damage?" he queried.

"Nothing," returned Higginson Peabody; "they are freely yours."

"What's the subscription to this rag?" asked Rattlesnake, pointing up at the sign above the door. "How much does she cost for a year?"

"Two dollars," broke in Jack, who was the circulating agency of the *Weekly Planet*.

"Thar's a saw-buck," quoth Rattlesnake, bringing up

a ten-dollar goldpiece and tossing it to Jack. "Put down Rattlesnake Sanders for five years." Then, as he buried a spur in his pony's flank and fled like an arrow: "I'll send th' address as soon as I settle down."

When Rattlesnake Sanders injured Mr. Kelly's arm Mr. Masterson was at the other end of town. It was ten minutes before he heard of the gay doings of Rattlesnake. When word reached him he threw a saddle onto a pony and started in pursuit. Mr. Masterson also halted at the open door of the *Weekly Planet*, only he was after information, not apparel.

"Did you see a cowboy without coat or hat go by?" asked Mr. Masterson, on the bare chance that the phenomenon had caught the eye of Higginson Peabody.

"I just gave one my coat and hat," replied Higginson Peabody.

"It was Rattlesnake Sanders," said Mr. Masterson, settling himself in his stirrups for a run. "He's creased Kelly. Which way did he go?"

Before Higginson Peabody could answer, Jack took reply from his mouth.

"I'll show you, Mr. Masterson," observed the eager Jack, pointing westward towards the Cimarron Crossing. "He lined out in that direction. An' say, he was simply hittin' the high places!"

Now, be it known that Rattlesnake had fled away to

the north and east, as though heading for Hays—a course the reverse of that given by Jack. The intervention, and the brisk falsehoods so cheerfully fulminated, took away the breath of Higginson Peabody. Before he regained it Mr. Masterson was a mile on his way to the Cimarron Crossing.

“How could you lie like that?” demanded Higginson Peabody, regarding Jack with wondering horror; “how could you lie like that, and you but fourteen! That Rattlesnake man went east, not west; and Mr. Masterson is an officer of the law!”

“What of it?” retorted Jack, indignantly; “d’you think I’d throw down a subscriber?” Then, as he reached for his cap: “I reckon I’d better go over to the Alhambra an’ see how hard old Kell got plugged. It ought to be good for a column. Say!” and Jack beamed on Higginson Peabody, “if he’d only beefed old Kell, wouldn’t it have been hot stuff?”

Higginson Peabody, when he graduated from Harvard, had been invited into the counting-room of his father’s State Street bank. But the old migratory instinct of his puritan ancestry was rife within him, and he hungered to go abroad into the land. The expanding West invited him; also, he distasted a bank and liked the notion of a paper.

“Well,” said the elder Peabody, “I don’t blame you.

Massachusetts and Boston aren't what they were. New England to-day is out in Kansas and Nebraska."

Higginson Peabody resolved to start a paper. Dodge occurred to him; a friend returning had told him that newsy things were prone to happen in Dodge. The soil, by the friend's word, was kindly; Higginson Peabody thought it would nourish and upbuild a paper. Wherefore, one bright autumnal morning, he dropped off at Dodge. Going over to the hotel he took a room by the month and confided to Mr. Wright that he would found the *Weekly Planet*.

Mr. Wright squeezed the hand of Higginson Peabody until it hung limp as a rag.

"It was an inspiration when you decided to come to Dodge," said Mr. Wright.

"Do you think," asked Higginson Peabody, painfully separating each finger from its fellows, "do you think your city ready for the birth of a great paper?"

"Ready? Dodge'll sit up nights to rock its cradle and warm its milk!" quoth Mr. Wright.

Mr. Wright went down to the Long Branch and told Mr. Short. As information radiated from the Long Branch the extremest corner of Dodge was filled with the news in an hour.

When Mr. Wright withdrew to the Long Branch he left Higginson Peabody sitting on the hotel porch. The

costume of Higginson Peabody culminated in a silk hat that would have looked well on Boston Common. The tall, shiny hat excited the primitive interest of Cimarron Bill, who lightly shot it from the head of its owner. Then, with bullet following bullet, he rolled it along the sidewalk. Several gentlemen joined Cimarron Bill in this sprightly pastime of the hat. Full twenty took part, and Higginson Peabody's headgear, to quote Cimarron Bill as he reported the episode later to Mr. Masterson, was:

"A heap shot up."

"He's an editor," warned Mr. Masterson, "and going to start a paper. Mind, you mustn't hurt him!"

"Hurt him!" retorted Cimarron Bill. "If I do I hope to go afoot the balance of my life—I do, shore!"

Mr. Wright returned from the Long Branch, bringing Mr. Short. Higginson Peabody mentioned the adventures of his hat.

"It's my fault," said Mr. Wright; "I'd ought to have told you. That breed of war-bonnet is ag'inst the rules of our set."

"That's right," coincided Mr. Short; "only soocides wear 'em in Dodge."

"We'll fix it," observed Mr. Wright, who noticed that Higginson Peabody looked cast down. "What's the size of your head?"

"Seven and an eighth," returned Higginson Peabody, doubtfully.

"Seven and an eighth!" repeated Mr. Wright: "It'll grow in Dodge. See if it ain't two sizes larger in a month."

Mr. Wright sent over to that mart whereof he was proprietor, and presently a pearl-gray sombrero appeared.

"There you are!" exclaimed Mr. Wright. "As good a Stetson as ever rode in a round-up! Price? Not a word! I'll take it out in advertising."

Mr. Wright became as an elder brother to Higginson Peabody. On the morning following the latter's advent the two sat convenient to the hotel bar and talked of Indians. That is, Mr. Wright talked of Indians, and Higginson Peabody gulped and listened, pale of cheek.

Mr. Wright said a Cheyenne was as full of the unexpected as a career in Wall Street. He hoped the Cheyennes wouldn't kill and scalp anybody about Dodge between then and Christmas. Mr. Wright set his limit at Christmas because that was three months away, and three months was as long as even an optimist was licensed to hope anything of a Cheyenne.

No, Mr. Wright did not think the Cheyennes would immediately bother Dodge. They were busy with the buffaloes at that season. Moreover, there were a num-

ber of buffalo hunters along the Medicine Lodge and the Cimarron whom they, the Cheyennes, might capture and burn at the stake. This would, so Mr. Wright argued, slake the Cheyenne thirst for immediate amusement. Later, when they had burned up that year's stock of buffalo hunters and were suffering from ennui, the Cheyennes would doubtless visit Dodge.

"But," declared Mr. Wright, triumphantly, "we generally beat 'em off. They never capture or kill more'n fifty of us before we have 'em routed. Sure; we down three times as many of them as they do of us. Which reminds me: come down to Kelly's Alhambra and let me show you the head-dresses and bead jackets we shucked from the last outfit we wiped out."

Mr. Wright exhibited to Higginson Peabody what trophies had been brought north from the 'Dobe Walls and were then adorning the walls of the Alhambra. Also, he had Mr. Kelly, who was their custodian, bring out the eighty scalps, and counted them into the shrinking fingers of Higginson Peabody, who handled them gingerly. They were one and all, so Mr. Wright averred, stripped from slaughtered Cheyennes in the streets of Dodge.

"Isn't that so, Kell?" asked Mr. Wright, appealing to Mr. Kelly.

"Shore!" assented Mr. Kelly. Then, by way of par-

ticular corroboration and picking out a brace of scalps whereof the braided hair was unusually long and glossy, "I killed an' skelped these two right yere in the s'loon."

Higginson Peabody was impressed and said he would one day write up what he had heard for the *Weekly Planet*.

Mr. Wright invited Higginson Peabody to explore the region lying back of Dodge. They would make the trip on ponies. Mr. Wright held that the exploration was requisite to the right editing of a local paper.

"For how," demanded Mr. Wright, plausibly, "can you get out a paper and know nothing of the country you're in? As for Cheyennes, you need entertain no fear. You'll have a pony under you that can beat an antelope."

Higginson Peabody, with Mr. Wright as guide, philosopher and friend, broke into the gray rolling desert to the north of Dodge. At the end of the first mile Dodge dropped out of sight behind a swell and Higginson Peabody found himself surrounded by naught save the shadowless plains—as grimly stark as when they slipped from the palm of the Infinite! The very picture of loneliness, the scene pressed upon the unsophisticated sensibilities of Higginson Peabody like a menace. He wanted to return to Dodge, but he didn't like to say so.

Mr. Wright became replete of reminiscences. He

showed Higginson Peabody where a party of emigrants had been butchered by the Cheyennes only eight weeks before.

By the side of a water hole Mr. Wright pointed to the ashes of a fire. The Cheyennes had there grilled a victim on the coals.

"You see," explained Mr. Wright, in apology for the Cheyennes, "they didn't have any stake. The best they could do was tie him, wrist and heel, toss him in the fire and then keep him there with their lances."

"Was he from Dodge?" faltered Higginson Peabody.

"No," said Mr. Wright, carelessly, "if my memory serves, he was a sot from Abilene."

Ten minutes later they were winding along a dry arroya.

"What's that?" exclaimed Mr. Wright, and he leaped from his pony.

Mr. Wright held up a moccasin which, apparently, he had taken from the ground.

"Cheyenne," said Mr. Wright, sinking his voice to a whisper. "Warm, too; that moccasin was on its owner not five minutes ago!"

Higginson Peabody took the buckskin footgear in his hands, which shook a little. The moccasin *was* warm. It could hardly have been otherwise since Mr. Wright had carried it in an inside pocket.

Mr. Wright glanced furtively about.

“We’d better skin out for Dodge,” said he.

Higginson Peabody wheeled, being quite in the humour for Dodge. He was on the threshold of saying so when a medley of yelps and yells broke forth. Higginson Peabody cast a look to the rear; a score of be-feathered and ochre-bedabbled demons were in open cry not a furlong away.

Mr. Wright had made no idle brag when he said the pony bestrode by Higginson Peabody could outstrip an antelope. The latter gave that animal its head and the scenery began racing rearward in a slate-coloured blur. Mr. Wright’s pony was panting on the flank of its flying mate.

“Ride hard!” shouted Mr. Wright. “To be captured is death by torture!”

Higginson Peabody did ride hard. There was a rattle of rifles and six-shooters; the high lead ripped and whined and whistled—new sounds to the shrinking ears of Higginson Peabody! Now and again a bullet scuttered along the ground to right or left and threw up ominous pinches of dust. Suddenly Mr. Wright reeled in the saddle.

“Save yourself!” he gasped. “Tell Masterson and the boys——”

The rest was lost to Higginson Peabody, for Mr.

Wright's pony, evidently as badly wounded as its rider, began falling to the rear.

On tore Higginson Peabody. Dodge at last! Drawing a deep breath he swept down the main street like a tornado.

"Indians! Indians!" yelled Higginson Peabody.

Arriving opposite its home corral the pony set four hoofs and skated; recovering, it wheeled to the left. Higginson Peabody, by these abrupt manœuvres, was spilled from the saddle "like a pup from a basket," according to Mr. Kelly, who watched the ceremony from the Alhambra door.

Higginson Peabody reached the grass in a convenient ball. After a prolonged roll of twenty feet he scrambled up uninjured.

"Get your guns!" he cried to Mr. Kelly, and then began to run.

It was afterward a matter of regret in Dodge that no arrangements had been made for timing Higginson Peabody. He had only covered one hundred yards when he ran into the arms of Mr. Masterson, but it was the dispassionate judgment of both Mr. Kelly and Mr. Short, who, from their respective houses of entertainment, reviewed the feat, that he did those one hundred yards in better than ten seconds. Indeed, so much was popular admiration excited by the winged work of Higginson

Peabody that, in commemoration thereof, Dodge renamed him the "Jackrabbit," by which honourable appellation he was ever afterward known to its generous inhabitants.

"Get your guns!" shouted Higginson Peabody when stopped by the outspread arms.

"What's the trouble?" asked Mr. Masterson.

"Indians!" yelled the fugitive, making an effort to resume his flight.

"Come," said Mr. Masterson, refusing to be shaken off, "it's only a joke. What you need now is a drink. Let's push for Luke Short's."

While Higginson Peabody stood at the Long Branch bar and restored that confidence in his fellow-men which a two-days' stay in Dodge had done much to shake, Cimarron Bill and a select bevy, clad in full Cheyenne regalia, faces painted, blankets flying, feathers tossing, came whooping down the street. They jumped from their steaming ponies and joined Mr. Masterson and their victim.

"The drinks is on me!" shouted Cimarron Bill, giving the counter a resounding slap. "Which I'm as dry as a covered bridge!"

"The drinks is on the house," said Mr. Short, severely. Then to Higginson Peabody, "Here's to you, stranger! An' let me say," concluded Mr. Short, while a colour of

compliment showed through his tones, "that if ever you do run a footrace I'll string my money on you."

As he considered the incident, Higginson Peabody was inclined to refuse the boon of Mr. Wright's further acquaintance, but Mr. Masterson and Mr. Kelly explained that to do so would be regarded, by the liberal sentiment of Dodge, as churlish in the extreme.

"That scamper into camp," urged Mr. Kelly, "oughtn't to count. It's only folks we like an' intend to adopt into our midst on whom we confer them rites of initiation."

"That's whatever," observed Cimarron Bill, who came up. "Which we shore wouldn't take that much trouble with any gent unless we liked him."

During his last year at Harvard Higginson Peabody edited the college paper, and that, when he landed in Dodge, had been the whole of his journalistic experience. While he conducted that vehicle of college information his one notable triumph was an article on Bible reading, in which he urged that all Bibles be bound in red. He pointed out an inherent interest to abide in red and quoted its effect on turkey gobblers. On the other hand, black, the usual cover-colour of Bibles, was a hue sorrowful and repellent; so far from inviting human interest, it daunted it. Higginson Peabody insisted that were every copy of the scriptures bound in red a score would

read where only one perused them in their black uniform of gloom. This article gained him the compliment of a reprimand from the university heads and an accusation on the part of rivals that he was trying to promote an importance for his college colours.

Notwithstanding this meagre apprenticeship in journalism Higginson Peabody, from its initial issue, made the *Weekly Planet* a highly readable paper. This was peculiarly the case after he, on Mr. Masterson's endorsement, had added Jack to his staff. It was Jack who brought in those spicy personal items which told in complimentary fashion the daily or rather nightly doings at Mr. Kelly's Alhambra, Mr. Short's Long Branch, Mr. Webster's Alamo, and Mr. Peacock's Dance Hall, to say nothing of the Dodge Opera House and Mr. Wright's store, and which caused every reader to pick up the paper with pleasure and lay it down with regret. Also, it was Jack who taught Higginson Peabody the money value of a line of advertising that published cattle brands and set forth the boundaries of ranges, so that round-up outfits might intelligently hold the herds and cut out each ranchman's cattle in what regions they belonged. Indeed, with Jack at his elbow Higginson Peabody carried the *Weekly Planet* to a point where it almost paid.

It was when the *Weekly Planet* had counted its thir-

teenth issue that Higginson Peabody took up the question of a circulation. At that time the paper owned but thirty-four subscribers. Dodge was small; the paper could be passed from hand to hand; those thirty-four copies, during the seven days when they were fresh, were read and appreciated by every eye in Dodge. Under such circumstances thirty-four copies would be enough; the demands of Dodge did not call for any more. Clearly, some argument beyond the argument of mere news was required to build up a *Weekly Planet* circulation.

Higginson Peabody, in conference with Jack, said that he thought of starting a baby contest. The paper would offer a prize for the most beautiful baby in Dodge.

Jack stood like a rock against this proposition. He showed how in all Dodge there were but two babies, and that the mother in each marvellous instance held her darling to be a cherub fresh descended from on high. That mother would make trouble for the *Weekly Planet* and all connected therewith if any rival infant were pitched upon as that cherub's superior.

"The mother," said Jack, ominously, "whose young one got beat would let her hair down her back, give her war-yell, and simply leave the *Weekly Planet* on both sides of the Arkansaw. Besides, that gent don't jingle a spur in Dodge who's game to act as judge. But,"

continued Jack, when Higginson Peabody, impressed by the serpent-like wisdom of his young assistant, had abandoned every notion of a baby contest, "I've thought up a play that ought to make the paper as popular as tortillas with a Mexican. How about a pie contest? Wouldn't that meet the needs of the hour?" And Jack's mouth took on an unctous expression.

Jack explained his scheme. The *Weekly Planet* would offer a five-years' subscription, free, for the best pie, any sort or species, sent to its editorial rooms, accompanied by the name of the authoress, within four calendar weeks of the announcement.

"We want to personally interest the ladies," said Jack, "and a pie contest will do it."

Higginson Peabody was struck by the original force of Jack's suggestion. Hailing from what Mr. Warner called "the region of perpetual pie," he could appreciate its merits. He put but one question:

"Whom shall we name as judge?" Higginson Peabody also added that it was beyond his own genius to act in that capacity, alleging a dyspepsia.

Jack's eyes lit up like the windows of a hurdy-gurdy on the evening of a fandango.

"I'll be judge," said Jack.

The value of a pie contest as a spur to circulation gained immediate exhibition. The *Weekly Planet*

jumped from thirty-four to one hundred and ten, and new subscriptions coming every hour.

Also, pies began to appear—pies of every kind. There was the morose mince, the cheerful dried apple, the sedate pumpkin, the consoling custard, the flippant plum; every variety of dried or canned goods on Mr. Wright's broad shelves was drawn upon to become the basis of pie.

Since no limit had been placed upon her labours, every fair contestant sent ardent scores of entries. Lest one baking had been slightly burned on the under crust, each lady broke forth in further bakings, and by the end of the second day of that rivalry pies had accumulated on the premises of the *Weekly Planet* by the gross. They were stacked up in tiers of twelve on the editorial table, they covered printing-press and make-up stones, there were no chairs left and hardly room remained to move about among the cases because of pies. And the end was not yet; the third day opened with an aggregate consignment of eighty pies, and each confection a hopeful claimant of that five-years' free subscription.

When Jack evolved a pie contest he had no foreknowledge of what would be its fatal popularity. In proposing to act as judge of that pastry competition he in no wise foresaw the pie-deluge which would set in. Still, being of the material from which heroes are made,

Jack bore himself doughtily. The first day he ate twenty-eight pies; the second day he got no further than twenty; on the third day, with two hundred untouched pies awaiting his sampling tooth, Jack fell ill.

"Of course," said Jack, feebly, "I could go on, I s'ppose, and I'll sell my life dearly; but what's the use? What could one boy do against two hundred pies?"

Jack was undeniably ill, but as one whose spirit remains unconquerable, he would not go to bed. Although he could not look at a pie, he appeared about the office, like some criminal ghost obliged to haunt the scenes of its malefactions. And Jack was still capable of a suggestion. It was by his word that the three printers were named as an auxiliary commission to aid in forming an official judgment of those pies.

It was of scant avail. At the close of the fifth day the foreman came to Higginson Peabody wearing a look of defeat. Even three printers had been powerless before that storm of pie.

"Bill's down an' out," said the foreman, dejectedly. Bill was one of the two journeymen printers. "It was a lemon pie Miss Casey made that floored him. To get the kinks out o' Bill I had to give him a gallon of Kelly's best Old Jordan, an' at that he ain't been the same man since."

"What shall we do?" queried Higginson Peabody,

desperately. "We'll be buried alive beneath an avalanche of pie!"

The foreman was a fertile printer, and thought he might find a purchaser for those pies. Higginson Peabody recklessly authorised him in that behalf. Borrowing a pony from Mr. Trask's corral, the foreman went to Cimarron and arranged for the disposal of present as well as future pies at the rate of a dollar the dozen pies, to Mr. Ingalls of the Golden Rod restaurant. The following evening the premises of the *Weekly Planet* were happily free from pies, and the greenish cast in Jack's cheek was giving way to the old-time hue of boyish health.

No harm would have come, and the *Weekly Planet* might have continued in its useful orbit undisturbed, had it not been for a visit that Aunt Nettie Dawson paid to Cimarron. Aunt Nettie was sedately walking in Cimarron's only thoroughfare, intent on naught save a social hour with a valued friend, resident of that hamlet, when her glance was arrested by a certain pie in the window of the Golden Rod. It was of the mince family, and its top crust was ornamented with sundry nicks and flourishes, made by the point of a knife, and which in their whole effect resembled the remains of a pair of centipedes that had met a violent death. Aunt Nettie put on her glasses, took a second look to make sure, and

then stalked into the Golden Rod, demanding its proprietor by name.

“Wherever did you-all get my pie, Bill Ingalls?” was the question which Aunt Nettie put. The frown that darkened her brow was like a threat.

Mr. Ingalls, commonly, was a brave and truthful man, and yet he told Aunt Nettie that he didn’t know. Mr. Ingalls said that the particular pie to which she pointed was a mystery and its origin wrapped in fog. Aunt Nettie snorted.

“You needn’t lie to me, Bill Ingalls,” she retorted; “you got it of that beanstalk editor. I’ll show that cheap Yankee who he’s foolin’ with as soon as ever I see Dodge ag’in.”

Higginson Peabody was discussing some subject of *Weekly Planet* economy with Jack when Aunt Nettie came in. Jack, being a frontier lad and keen to every sign of danger, realised the storm in its approach and fled for Mr. Masterson. His chief, less alive to the peril, turned pleasantly on Aunt Nettie.

“What can I do, Miss Dawson?” he said.

“Where’s that mince I sent y’ yisterday?” demanded Aunt Nettie, manner as brittle and as hard as glass. “It’s got two fern leaves marked on the kiver.”

Higginson Peabody said never a word; panting like some trapped animal, he could only look at Aunt Nettie.

Then Aunt Nettie unfurled the story of his perfidy.

"An' so," said Aunt Nettie, in sour conclusion, "you allowed you'd dee-fraud us ladies of Dodge into bakin' onlimited pies for them drunkards over in Cimarron!"

Aunt Nettie made a house to house canvass and told each lady the story of their mutual wrongs. There was a scurrying round-up of shawls and shakers. Within thirty minutes fourscore pie contestants, Aunt Nettie at their angry head, were moving on the office of the *Weekly Planet*. They found the door closed and locked. Mr. Masterson, urged by Jack and realising the danger, had been before them. By advice of that tried strategist Higginson Peabody had barricaded his portals. He dragged the office counter across the locked door and then cowered behind double defences, fearing the worst.

"Never mind," said Aunt Nettie, addressing her injured sisters, "he's simply got to come out, an' we'll jest nacherally camp on his doorstep till he does." This last ferociously.

The *Weekly Planet* was in a state of siege, and word of that beleaguerment went through Dodge like wildfire. With scared faces Mr. Wright, Mr. Masterson, Mr. Short, Mr. Trask, Mr. Kelly and others among the town's bravest spirits, gathered for conference in the Long Branch.

"What are we to do?" asked Mr. Masterson, anxious-

ly. "I don't want to be understood as shirking a duty, but if I'd known there was to be any such feminine uprising as this I'd never been sheriff of Ford."

Mr. Wright made a despairing gesture.

"I haven't," said Mr. Wright, "felt so he'pless an' unprotected since Mr. Lee's surrender."

"What be we to do?" and Mr. Kelly repeated Mr. Masterson's question. Then, as though making reply: "Whatever can we do? Thar's them ladies on the war-path, an' Aunt Nettie at their head! She's that inflexible, granite's easy to her! An' as for courage, Aunt Nettie teaches it. Thar's nothin' she's feared of on four legs or two."

"Yes thar is," interjected Cimarron Bill, who stood listening. "Which Aunt Nettie's timid of cows."

There was a suggestion in the remark; strung like a bow by the difficulties of the situation Mr. Masterson seized upon it. Two words to Cimarron Bill and in another moment that hard-riding gentleman and a dozen hard-riding companions were cinching the hulls onto their ponies in Mr. Trask's corral. Once in the saddle, away they tore for the river and began scrambling across, through deeps and shallows, with dire riot and uproar.

On the south side of the river, up to their stolid knees in the rank grasses, were from fifty to one

hundred head of cattle. These tossed wondering horns and blew loudly through their noses as Cimarron Bill and his mates came charging across. Their ruminations suffered further disturbance when, with headlong speed, those charging ones fell bodily upon them, rounded them up, hurled them into the river and sent them for the north bank on the jump. With bellow of protest the outraged cattle were rushed along. Once on the north bank they were cleverly bunched and, still on the canter, swung down on the office of the *Weekly Planet*.

The first to observe the approach of that horned phalanx, with the urgent riders whooping and dashing about in the rear, was Miss Casey of the lemon pies.

"Oh, look at them awful cows, Miss Dawson, dear!" she screamed, and pointed with horrified finger.

Not alone Aunt Nettie, but every lady looked. It was enough; there was a chorus of squeaks, a vast flutter of skirts, and the fair vigilantes, gathered to revenge their betrayed pies, had scattered like a flock of blackbirds.

Aunt Nettie was the last to go. She gazed at the oncoming cattle as they swept down upon the *Weekly Planet*, with lowered horn and steamy nostril; she identified her recreant nephew, Cimarron Bill, and knew the whole as a masterpiece of Mastersonian diplomacy.

"The cowards!" she exclaimed.

Then Aunt Nettie clawed her petticoats about her and skurried after the others. The next moment the pushing, milling, foaming band were jammed and held about the building of the *Weekly Planet*. The ruse had worked, the siege was lifted.

Mr. Masterson, on his best pony and with a lead pony by the bridle, made his way through the herd to the door.

“Don’t waste a moment,” cried Mr. Masterson to Higginson Peabody, tossing him the reins of the lead pony the moment that journalist could be prevailed on to open his doors; “into the saddle with you and head for Cimarron. As sheriff of Ford I’ll see you safe as far as the county line.”

When Mr. Masterson, with Higginson Peabody, drew bridle at the boundary line between Ford and Gray counties, Mr. Masterson gave the other his hand.

“Look out for yourself,” he said; “catch the express for the East!”

“Don’t you think,” inquired Higginson Peabody, quaveringly, “that after the excitement cools off I can come back?”

Mr. Masterson firmly shook his head.

“There isn’t a chance,” said he. “If they were white men, or even Cheyennes, I’d say ‘Yes.’ But they’re ladies, and you know what ladies are! I’m reckoned a judge in matters of life and death, and I tell you

frankly that if it were twenty years from now, and you showed up in Dodge, I wouldn't guarantee your game a moment."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN INVASION OF DODGE.

AFTER MR. MASTERSON killed Messrs. Wagner and Walker, who murdered his brother Ed, the word of that bloodshed was not slow in reaching Texas. The tale, when told throughout those cow-camps whose hundred fires winked along the Canadian, aroused an interest the fundamental element whereof was wrath.

The tragedy deeply displeased all Texas people of cows. The dead gentlemen had been Texans. Mr. Masterson, on the exasperating other hand, was an emanation of Illinois. That he was sheriff of Ford owned no importance. That Messrs. Wagner and Walker had slain Mr. Masterson's brother and were killed while their hands were red was permitted to have no weight. Cowboys are a volatile lot; they probe no question over-deep, surely none so commonplace as a question of homicide. Wherefore, in connection with the blinking out of Messrs.

Wagner and Walker, they of Texas chose to consider only the Texas origin of deceased. Angry with the injured vanity of tribe, they spake evil of Mr. Masterson and nursed vague feuds against him in their hearts.

There was a Mr. Gato, just then riding for the Turkey Track. Mr. Gato was neither old nor reputable. He is dead now, and the ravens and coyotes have wrangled over his ignoble bones. Other Turkey Track boys called Mr. Gato the "Tomcat"—this latter to give his name in English.

Mr. Gato was native of the Panhandle. Twenty-three years before, his Mexican father and Comanche mother had had a family row in selecting for him a name. His mother desired to call him two or three Comanche gutterals which, when hyphenated, stand for Scorpion. It was a notion not without merit; but his Mexican father objected, hence that household jar. The padre of their church came finally to the rescue and led the clashing couple to "Patricio" as a compromise. The infant, howling like a pagan, was baptised "Patricio Gato." Next day everybody forgot all about it as a thing of little consequence. As set forth, however, his mates of the ranges renamed Mr. Gato the "Tomcat." On second thought it may be just as well to follow their example; the word will sound more convincing to American ears.

If the Tomcat had been all Mexican or all Comanche

this leaf might never have been written. But he was half Mexican and half Comanche, and the blend was unfortunate. The Tomcat, ignorant, vicious, furtive, savage, was upon an intellectual level with the wolf, and of impulses as secret and as midnight. Also, he was dominated of an inborn pride to shed blood. He had been withheld from feeding that pride by stress of the rickety cross in his veins; he lacked the downright courage which was the enterprise's first demand.

The riders of the Turkey Track were fairly aware of the Tomcat's congenital depravity. In regions where there is but little of the law, as against a deal of the individual, men who would call themselves secure must learn to estimate the folk about them. And they do. It was common knowledge, therefore, that the Tomcat was blood-hungry. It was likewise known that his hardihood in no sort matched his crimson appetite. As spoke Mr. Cook—a promising youth was Mr. Cook, and one wise of his generation:

“He'd admire to take a skelp, that Tomcat would, but he's shy the sand.”

This was Turkey Track decision, and, since it was so, the Tomcat went vested of no personal terrors. He was not loved, but he was not feared; and his low standing in that community—if so sparse a thing as a cow-camp may be thus described—of which he was a fameless unit,

found suggestion in occasional sneers of more or less broadish point, the latter contingent on the vivacious recklessness of the author in each instance.

The Tomcat, during their lives, had not been numbered among the friends of Messrs. Wagner and Walker. He was not possessed of even a drinking acquaintance with those vanished ones. Indeed, he never so much as heard of their existence until he heard that they were dead. It is due the Tomcat to say that this was chance and not because of any social delicacy on the part of the ones departed.

Despite a lack of personal interest, while the Tomcat listened to the sour comments of those spurred and broad-brimmed ones of Texas as the story of Mr. Masterson's pistol practice found relation, a thought took struggling shape in the narrow fastnesses of his wit. He would ride those two hundred northward miles to Dodge and destroy Mr. Masterson. Throughout two seasons he had gone with the beef herds over the Jones and Plummer trail, and, since the terminus of that thoroughfare lay in Dodge, he knew the way.

Also, at those beef times he had been given glimpses of Mr. Masterson, about the streets in his rôle of protector of the public peace. The Tomcat did not recall Mr. Masterson as one uncommonly dangerous. He remembered him as of middle size and a tolerant, thought-

ful eye. The Tomcat, when he thus gazed on Mr. Masterson, was somewhat thickened of drink. Still, had Mr. Masterson been more than usually perilous, the fact would have left some impress upon him, however steeped in rum. No; he was convinced that Mr. Masterson was not a problem beyond his powers. He would repair to Dodge and solve Mr. Masterson with his six-shooter.

Whenever he should return to the Panhandle, bearing Mr. Masterson's hair upon his bridle-rein, the Tomcat foresaw how his status as one of iron-bound fortitude would be thereby and instantly fixed. He would be placed in the deadly foreground with such worthies as Doc Holiday, Shotgun Collins, Curly Bill and Soapy Smith. Poets would make verses about him as they had about the sainted Samuel Bass, dance-hall maidens would sing his glory in quavering quatrains. Thus dreamed the Tomcat on the banks of the Canadian as he lay by a Turkey Track campfire, while his comrades declaimed of Mr. Masterson and the sorrowful taking off of Messrs. Wagner and Walker, aforesaid. It was the Tomcat's vision of fame; rude, bloody, criminal, but natural for the man and the day and the land it grew among.

It was in the hot middle hours of the afternoon. The Tomcat had come into camp bringing five cows with their

unmarked offspring—this was the spring round-up. The five cows with their bawling children were thrown into the general bunch, which would start next day for the branding pen.

Having gotten a mouthful at the grub-wagon the Tomcat thoughtfully walked his tired broneo towards the band of ponies which the horse-hustler was holding in the bottom grass that bordered the Canadian. There were eight riders with this particular outfit. Wherefore the band of ponies counted about sixty head, for each cowboy employs from seven to ten personal ponies in his labours and rides down three a day.

The Tomcat's pregnant purpose formed the night before was in no sort abated; it had grown more clear and strong with the hours. It looked sensibly feasible, too, as all things do when miles and weeks away. The Tomcat was wholly decided; he would ride to Dodge and collect the hair of the offensive Mr. Masterson. Likewise, since the idea improved upon him pleasantly, he would start at once.

In and out among the grazing ponies wound the Tomcat. At last he discovered what he sought. He pitched the loop of his rope over the head of a little bay, with four black legs and an eye like the full-blown moon.

This pony had name for speed and bottom. He had come from the ranges of the Triangle-dot, whose ponies,

as all the cow-world knows, have in them a streak of the thoroughbred. The one roped by the Tomcat, carrying a thirty-pound saddle and a hundred-and-fifty-pound man, could put one hundred even miles behind him between dark and dark. He had never tasted anything better than mother's milk and grass and would have drawn back and hollyhocked his nostrils at an ear of yellow corn as though that vegetable were a rattlesnake.

As the Tomcat was shifting his saddle from the weary one to the pony freshly caught the horse-hustler came riding out from the shadow of a cottonwood.

"I wouldn't be in your saddle," observed the horse-hustler to the Tomcat, busy over his girths, "for the price of fifty steers if Jack Cook crosses up with you on his little Shylock hoss." The name of the bay pony was the name of Shakespeare's Jew.

Upon a round-up a cowpony has two proprietors. His title, doubtless, is vested in the ranch whose brand he wears. Body and soul, however, he belongs to that cowboy to whom he is told off. Each boy has his string, and any other boy would as soon think of rifling that youth's warbags as riding one of his ponies without permission. The pony from whose neck still hung the detaining lariat of the Tomcat had been detailed by the Turkey Track to the use and behoof of Mr. Cook.

"Jack said I could take him," returned the Tomcat as he leaped into the saddle.

This was a lie, but the horse-hustler never mistrusted. It was not that he had faith in the veracity of the Tomcat, but he relied upon his want of courage. Mr. Cook, while an excellent soul in the main, was prey to restless petulances. The horse-hustler did not believe that the Tomcat would intrude with the possessions of Mr. Cook lacking that gentleman's consent. When Shylock was ready the Tomcat turned his nervous muzzle towards the north and was off at a cheerful road-gait.

While scrambling up an arroya and pointing for the table-lands beyond, the Tomcat ran into Mr. Cook, picking his way towards the outfit's evening camp. Mr. Cook was surprised at the picture of the Tomcat astride his sacred Shylock. The Tomcat appeared dashed, not to say dismayed, by the meeting.

"What be you-all doin' on my Shylock?" demanded Mr. Cook, his hand not at all distant from the butt of his Colt's-45. "What be you-all doin' on my Shylock?" he repeated. Then, as the Tomcat was not ready with an explanation: "If you can't talk, make signs; an' if you can't make signs, shake a bush!"

Since a threat seemed to find lodgment in the manner of the choleric Mr. Cook, the Tomcat deemed it wise to be heard. Realising with a sigh that mendacity would

not clear the way, the Tomcat, in a cataract of confidence, imparted to Mr. Cook his scheme of vengeance against Mr. Masterson.

"An' I ought to have a good pony, Jack," pleaded the Tomcat. "I may need it to get away on."

When the Tomcat unfolded his plans to bring back the scalp of Mr. Masterson, Mr. Cook first stared and then went off into a gale of laughter. He almost forgot his valued Shylock.

"You bump off Bat Masterson!" he exclaimed. "Why, Tomcat, it needs the sharpest hand on the Canadian for that job, needs somebody as good as Old Tom Harris. Better go back to camp an' sleep it off. Bat Masterson would down you like cuttin' kyards."

The Tomcat, however, did not waver. Relieved when he noted the mollified vein of Mr. Cook, he urged his claim for the Shylock pony.

"Say 'yes,' Jack," said the Tomcat, "an' I'll be back in a month with that Bat Masterson's top-knot dangling from Shylock's bits."

"Well," remarked Mr. Cook, giving space in the arroyo for the Tomcat to pass, "onder the circumstances you-all can have Shylock. I don't feel like refusin' the last request of a dyin' man. Ride on, an' may your luck break even with your nerve."

The Tomcat went his northward path, but in the

treacherous hollows of his heart he hated Mr. Cook. The Tomcat raged for that he could not face a white of the pure blood without turning craven to the bone. It was that recreant cross in his veins; he knew, but couldn't cure the defect. He could hold his own with a Comanche, he could bully a Mexican to a standstill, but his heart became the heart of a hare whenever the cold, gray-eyed gaze of one of clean white strain fell across him in hostility. Halted by the high-tempered Mr. Cook, the Tomcat had fair melted in his saddle; and, while he gained his point and the pony, his wolfish soul was set none the less on fire.

"If I'd had two drinks in me I'd shot it out with him," considered the Tomcat by way of consoling himself. "I'd have filled him as full of lead as a bag of bullets! After I come back I'll nacherally take a crack at Johnny Cook. He won't front up to me so plumb confident an' gala after I've killed Bat Masterson."

Dodge took no absorbing interest in the Tomcat. His kind was frequent in its causeways, and the Tomcat as a specimen owned no attributes beyond the common save an inordinate appetite for liquor and a Ballard rifle. He could drink more whisky than was the custom of Dodge; also, the Ballard attracted attention in a region where

every fool used a Winchester and every wise man a Sharp's. But neither the Tomcat's capacity for strong drink nor yet his rifle could hold public curiosity for long, and within ten minutes after he strode into the Alhambra and called for his initial drink Dodge lost concern in him and turned to its own affairs.

The Tomcat, now he was in Dodge, seemed in little haste to search out Mr. Masterson. This was in no wise strange; for one thing his Shylock pony needed rest. Shylock had been put in Mr. Trask's corral and, gorging on alfalfa, was bravely filling out the hollows of his flanks.

The Tomcat decided that he would abide in Dodge two days before sounding his warcry. Then, just as night was drawing, he would saddle up and hunt the obnoxious Mr. Masterson. Upon meeting that officer the Tomcat would shoot him down. His mission thus happily concluded, he would make a spurring rush Panhandleward. Once on the Canadian he need not fear for his safety.

Running the plan forward and back in what he called his mind, the Tomcat reflected on his coming glorious reward! His daring manhood should be the theme on every lip! He would be called no more the "Tomcat," but gain rebaptism as the "Man who downed Bat Masterson!" The girls of the hurdy-gurdies would set his fame to music! Indeed, the Tomcat foresaw a gorgeous

picture when, returning to his native heath, he should wear laurel as that stout one who, from the fame of Texas, had washed a stain away. These matters ran like a millrace in the vainglorious thoughts of the Tomcat as he loafed about the barrooms of Dodge waiting for Shylock to recuperate and the moment of murder to ripely arrive.

On occasion the Tomcat brushed by Mr. Masterson in the narrow walks of Dodge. But the Tomcat did not give his victim-to-be a look. There was a steadfastness in the stare of Mr. Masterson that was as disconcerting to the Tomcat as had been the flinty eye of Mr. Cook when the latter brought him to bay that evening in the arroya. Wherefore when they met, the Tomcat gazed up or down the street, but never once at Mr. Masterson, albeit there reposed beneath his belt the whiskey whose absence he lamented when he quailed before the overbearing Mr. Cook.

“Never mind!” gritted the Tomcat behind his teeth; “I’ll try a shot at him if I swing for it.”

It was the day appointed by the virulent Tomcat for the downfall of Mr. Masterson. The Tomcat programmed the slaughter for that last moment when the setting sun should touch the hard, gray skyline. The Tomcat might want in mental depth, but he was clear concerning the value of night as a trail-coverer.

Under the pressure of events to come, the Tomcat's cunning had been so far promoted that he even thought of riding out of Dodge to the north after Mr. Masterson had been successfully obliterated. Then, when it was dark, he could swing to the south; not alone his trail, but his direction would be thus lost to whomsoever should pursue. A hot all-night ride should bring him to the Cimarron. There he would be out of Kansas and into the Indian Territory, Texas and celebration within easy fling. Now all this might have come to pass as the slender wisdom of the Tomcat schemed it had it not been for the unexpected.

It stood four for the hour with every honest clock in Dodge when the Tomcat, killing time, came into the Alhambra. There, among other attractions, he found a non-committal Mexican dealing monte.

The Tomcat cast a careless dollar on the queen, and lost. A second dollar vanished in pursuit of its predecessor. At that the Tomcat, holding Mexicans in cheap esteem, lifted up condemnatory voice.

"This is a robbers' roost!" quoth the depleted Tomcat, "an' every gent in it is a hoss-thief!"

Mr. Kelly, proprietor of the Alhambra, was present, dozing in a chair. The clamorous Tomcat aroused him with his uproar. It struck Mr. Kelly that the extravagance of the Tomcat's remark multiplied the insult it

conveyed. Without ado Mr. Kelly arose and exhaustively "buffaloed" that individual.

When an offender is "buffaloed" he is buffeted, shoved, choked, manhandled, and chucked into the street. Once on the sidewalk he is kicked until justice craves no more. In this instance the Tomcat was excessively "buffaloed," and at the close of the ceremony crawled to the cheap hotel wherein he had pitched his camp, there to nurse his bruises and bind up his wounds.

No, every violator of Western ethics is not "buffaloed." It is a method of reproof reserved for folk who are of slight estate. When one is known for the sandstone sort of his courage and the dignified accuracy of his gun, he is never "buffaloed." By his achievements he has raised himself superior to such reprimand, just as a Sioux warrior may lift himself above the power of tribal judges to "soldier-kill" him for misdemeanors, by his prowess in the field. Only humble offenders are "buffaloed." Those whose eminence forbids the ordeal may be shot instead. When one is too great to be "buffaloed" he is free to the gun of any man he injures. The law has abandoned him and his hand must keep his head. That the Tomcat was disgracefully "buffaloed" may be accepted as evidence that he had no respectful standing in Dodge.

As stated, after he had been "buffaloed" the Tomcat

withdrew to cure his aches while Mr. Kelly modified his own fatigues with three fingers of an Old Jordan which he kept especially for himself. The Tomcat had been so deeply "buffaloeed" that he did not move from his blankets for two days. Thereby the taking off of Mr. Masterson was deferred. Indeed, the current of the Tomcat's blood-desires found itself deflected. When he again crept forth, his ambition to kill Mr. Masterson had been supplanted by a vengeful wish to murder Mr. Kelly.

No one should marvel at this. Mr. Masterson, according to the Tomcat, had injured only the Texas public. Mr. Kelly had come ^{re-_g} nearly home with injuries personal to the limp _g Tomcat himself. All men prefer a private to a public interest. It was but nature moving when the wronged Tomcat, forgetting Mr. Masterson, for whose hair he had come so far, now gave himself heart and soul to how he might best spill the life of Mr. Kelly.

After mature study, when now he was again abroad, the Tomcat could devise nothing better than to pull up his pony in front of the Alhambra at the hour of eight in the evening and attempt, from the saddle, to pot Mr. Kelly with the Ballard. The Tomcat banged away with the Ballard all he knew, but the enterprise went astray in double fashion. The Tomcat missed Mr. Kelly by

a wide foot; also, he killed a girl whose mission it had been to dance and sing in the Alhambra for public gratification.

Shylock jumped sidewise at the flash, and the Tomcat, whose seat in the saddle had not been strengthened by his troubles, was thrown upon his head. Before he might recover the Dodge populace had piled itself above him, and the Tomcat was taken captive by twenty hands at once. He would have been lynched, only Mr. Masterson charged into the press. With the Tomcat held fast in one fist Mr. Masterson drew his six-shooter with the other and established therewith a zone of safety. Since Mr. Wright, who acted as alcalde, was at leisure, Mr. Masterson haled the Tomcat instantly before him.

If one were writing fiction, one from this point would find open sailing. One would have nothing more difficult to do than empanel a jury, convict and swing off the Tomcat. In this relation, however, there opens no such gate of escape. One must record a temporary good fortune that fell to the share of the Tomcat.

The Tomcat, somewhat a-droop, was brought into the presence of Mr. Wright, alcalde. Before a word might be said, a fusillade of pistol shots split the evening into splinters at the far end of the street. Two gentlemen were disagreeing; the dispute, audible to all in Dodge, aroused the liveliest curiosity. There befell a general

stampede, every man rushing towards the forum where debate was being waged.

So universal was that sentiment of curiosity that it even swept the careful Mr. Masterson from his official feet. He forgot for the nonce the Tomcat. He recovered himself only to learn that the Tomcat was gone. Our furtive one had slipped away in the hurly-burly, and since Shylock—who had been left saddled in the street—was also absent, the assumption obtained that the two had departed together and were already overhauling the distant Panhandle at the rate of fifteen miles the hour. Disgruntled by what he looked upon as his own gross neglect Mr. Masterson threw a hurried saddle onto the best horse in Dodge and flashed southward after the Tomcat.

Mr. Masterson was twenty minutes behind the hurrying Tomcat. Laid flat on the ground and measured, those twenty minutes, in the swallow-like instance of Shylock, would mean seven miles. Mr. Masterson cursed as he remembered this and considered how a stern chase is never a short chase. For all that Mr. Masterson was resolved, dead or alive, to have his man again.

“I’ll get him,” said Mr. Masterson, “if I have to swing and rattle with him from Dodge to the Rio Grande!”

Mr. Masterson had an advantage over the Tomcat.

He knew the country as a beggar knows his dish. At the end of the first three miles he struck into a short cut to the left. His design was to outride the Tomcat and cut him off at the ford of the Medicine Lodge.

Once in the side trail Mr. Masterson, like a good rider, disposed himself in the saddle so as to save his horse; the latter—big and rangy—uncoupled into that long, swinging gallop which carries the farthest because it is the easiest of gaits.

“It is the foxy thing to head this party off,” commended Mr. Masterson as he swept along. “Once I’m in his front he ought to be sure. A flying man never looks ahead.”

The white alkali trail spoke hard and loud beneath the horse’s hoof-irons. There was a veil of cloud across the face of the sky. Then the west wind put it aside and the moon and the big stars looked down. A coyote punctuated the stillness with its staccato song. A jackrabbit jumped up and went bustling ahead, never leaving the paper-white streak of trail that seemed to fascinate it. At last, breath gone and wholly pumped, it had just instinctive sense enough to wobble a yard to one side and escape being run down by the galloping horse. A band of antelope brushed across in front like startled shadows. Mr. Masterson was not to be engaged by these earmarks of the hour and place; he must reach the Medicine Lodge

in advance of the Tomcat. Lifting his horse to the work Mr. Masterson coaxed it through trail-devouring hours. Then there came an interference.

It was midnight by the shining word of the moon when a low roaring, distant and muffled, like the beat of a million drums, broke on Mr. Masterson. It was up the wind and from the west.

“What!” exclaimed Mr. Masterson aloud, and he pulled up his horse to listen. “It’s a good ways off as yet,” he continued. “It must be a hummer to send its word so far.” Then, patting his horse’s neck: “My sympathies will be all with you, old boy, when it reaches us.”

Over in the northwest a cloud came suddenly up with the swiftness of a drawn curtain. One by one it shut out like a screen the stars and the moon. Mr. Masterson was on the ground in the puff of an instant.

“It’ll detain him as much as it does me,” thought Mr. Masterson, whose mind ran always on his quarry.

Mr. Masterson took a pair of hobbles from the saddle and fastened the fore fetlocks of his horse. Then he stripped off the saddle.

“I’ll leave you the blanket,” remarked Mr. Masterson, “but I’m going to need the saddle for myself.”

Mr. Masterson crouched upon the ground, making the saddle a roof to cover his head, the skirts held tight

about his shoulders by the girths. The roar grew until from a million drums it improved to be a million flails on as many threshing-floors. Mr. Masterson clawed the saddleskirts tight as with a swish and a swirl the hail-storm was upon him. The round hailstones beat upon the saddle like buckshot. They leaped and bounded along the ground. They showed of a size and hardness to compare with those toys meant for children's games.

Saved by the saddle, Mr. Masterson came through without a mark. His horse, with nothing more defensive than a square of saddle-blanket, had no such luck. Above the drumming of the hailstones Mr. Masterson might hear that unfortunate animal as, torn by mixed emotions of pain, amazement and indignation, it bucked about the scene in a manner that would have done infinite grace to a circus. A best feature of the hailstorm was that it did not last five minutes; it passed to the south and east, and its mutterings grew fainter and more faint with every moment.

The storm over, Mr. Masterson caught up his horse, which seemed much subdued of spirit by what it had gone through. As gently as might be—to humour the bruises—he reined the heavy saddle in its place.

“Better keep you moving now, old boy,” quoth Mr. Masterson, “it’ll take the soreness out. You needn’t shout about it,” he concluded, as the sorely battered

horse gave a squeal of pain; "a hailstone isn't a bullet, and it might have been worse, you know."

Again Mr. Masterson stretched southward, and again the moon and stars came out to light the way. The storm had drawn forth the acrid earth-smells that sleep in the grass-roots on the plains. To mix with these, it brought a breath from the pine-sown Rockies four hundred miles away. These are the odours which soak into a man and make him forever of the West.

It was broad day when Mr. Masterson rode down to the lonely ford of the Medicine Lodge. He sighed with relief as his hawk-eye showed him how no one had passed since the storm.

"I'm in luck!" said he.

Mr. Masterson hopped his horse and set that tired animal to feed among the fresh green of the bottom. Then he unslung a pair of field-glasses, which he wore for the good of his office, and sent a backward glance along the trail. Rod by rod he picked it up for miles. There was no one in sight; he had come in ample time.

"I had the best of him ten miles by that cut-off," ruminated Mr. Masterson.

Then Mr. Masterson began to wish he had something to eat. He might have found a turkey in the brush-clumps along the Medicine Lodge. He might have risked the noise of a shot, being so far ahead. But Mr.

Masterson did not care to eat a turkey raw and he dared not chance a smoke; the Tomcat would have read the sign for miles and crept aside. Mr. Masterson drew his belt tighter by a hole and thought on other things than breakfast. It wouldn't be the first time that he had missed a meal, and with that thought he consoled himself. It is an empty form of consolation, as one who tries may tell.

"If there's anything I despise, it's hunger," said Mr. Masterson. He was a desperate fork at table.

Mr. Masterson lay out of view and kept his glasses on a strip five miles away, where the trail ribboned over a swell. There, in the end, he found what he sought; he made out the Tomcat, a bobbing speck in the distance.

Mr. Masterson put aside his glasses and planted himself where he would do the most good. While concealed he still commanded the approach to the ford. To give his presence weight Mr. Masterson had his sixteen-pound buffalo gun.

"As I remember this party," soliloquised Mr. Masterson, "I don't reckon now he's got sense enough to surrender when he's told. And when I think of that little lady dead in Dodge I don't feel like taking many chances. I'll hail him, and if he hesitates, the risk is his."

Thirty minutes had come and gone since Mr. Master-

son, through his glasses, followed the Tomcat down the far-off slope. Shylock, staunch as whalebone though he was, had found the clip a killer. He was not covering ground as in the beginning. There they were at last, the weary pony and the hunted man, both showing the wear and tear of pace.

Ballard ready on his hip, the Tomcat, giving a nervous over-shoulder look, brought Shylock to a walk. The broken pony came stumbling down to the ford. Mr. Masterson, with his mighty buffalo gun, aroused himself for official business.

“Drop that rifle!” said Mr. Masterson.

It was like a bolt from the blue to the spent and shaken Tomcat. He caught his breath in a startled way. Then, despair standing in the stead of courage, he tossed the Ballard into his left hand and fired, point-blank, at Mr. Masterson’s face where it showed above the bank. The bullet tossed the dust a yard to the left. Mixed bloods and Indians at their best are but poor hands with a rifle, and the Tomcat was at his worst.

With the crack of the Ballard came the bellow of the Sharp’s. The great bullet, which would have torn its way through the vitals of a buffalo-bull at eight hundred yards, brought the Tomcat whirling from the saddle like a stricken wild duck. What with sheer weariness and an inadvertent yank at the Spanish bits as the Tomcat went

overboard, poor Shylock crossed his tired forelegs, tripped, blundered, and fell. He came down on the Tomcat; in the scramble to get to his feet Shylock fell upon the Tomcat again.

Mr. Masterson slipped another cartridge into the buffalo gun. Then he warily approached the Tomcat, muzzle to the fore, finger on the trigger. A dying man will sometimes pull a six-shooter with the last flicker of his failing strength, and snatch a vengeance as he quits the earth.

Mr. Masterson seized the Tomcat by the shoulders and dragged him from under Shylock—still heaving and plunging to regain his feet. There was no call for a second look; the experienced Mr. Masterson could tell by the ash-colour struggling through the brown that the death-draw was on the Tomcat at the very moment.

The Tomcat, hiccoughing and bleeding, lay on the short stiff grass and rolled a hateful eye on his executioner. Mr. Masterson, thinking on the girl who died in Dodge, gave back a look as hateful. And this, in the midst of the lonesome plains, is what these two spoke to one another—these, the slayer and the slain, to show how bald is truth!

“You blank-blanked-blankety-blank! you ought to have made a better shot than that!” said the Tomcat.

“Well, you blank-blanked murderer, I did the best I could,” said Mr. Masterson.

Mr. Masterson, as he walked his horse over the hill upon which he had first beheld the coming of the Tomcat, halted and looked back. Shylock of the empty saddle nosed up to Mr. Masterson’s horse in a friendly way. Five miles to the south, on the banks of the Medicine Lodge, a raven wheeled and stooped. Away to the west a coyote yelped; another yelped an answer, and then another. Mr. Masterson shrugged his wide shoulders. The coyote by daylight makes gruesome melody.

“The ground was too hard to dig a grave,” said Mr. Masterson, as he turned his horse’s head again towards Dodge, “even if I’d had the tools. Besides, I wasn’t elected undertaker, but sheriff.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE MEDICINE OF LONE WOLF.

THE Lone Wolf had lost his "medicine," and that was a most serious disaster. To lose one's "medicine" among the Indians is equivalent to losing one's money among the Whites, and means just as bad a mess in one's social and business affairs. One's smell-feast friends of the day before go by one with averted or unseeing eye, while everything and everybody give evidence that one is beneath the notice of a self-respecting world.

Thus it was with the Lone Wolf when now his "medicine" had left him. Bear Shield, his chief, looked over him or through him without sign or word that might be construed into an admission of his existence. Fellow Cheyennes who had sat with him in the council or rode knee to knee with him in the charge no longer knew him by mark of face or sound of name. His squaws moped over the camp-fire with bowed heads; his pappooses

whimpered with the shame of what they felt but did not understand; his dogs, cowed and dispirited, crept about with craven tails clewed close between their legs; even his ponies made a disgraced band by themselves, cropping dejected grass apart, as though unfit to mingle with the reputable mustangs of mankind.

This situation was all the more a jolt to the sensibilities of the Lone Wolf, since he had been a personage of eminence and place. His voice had been high in tribal powwow, his strong hand resistless in war. He was rich in robes and ponies, in papposes and dogs and wives. The records of the "medicine" lodge showed him entitled to sing of the conquest of four scalps—one Pawnee, two Sioux, and one the former headwear of a drunken teamster of Sun City—which four topknots were drying on his tepee pole. By these one may know how to measure the heights from which the melancholy Lone Wolf had been hurled.

The Lone Wolf had lost his "medicine" without fault, that is fault from the standpoint of a paleface. He came down to the ford at the Beaver, when storms to the west had rendered it boiling and bank full. By reason of the boil and swirl, and the shifting quicksands under hoof, his pony lost its foothold and went down. In the splash and water-scramble that ensued, the Lone Wolf and his half-choked pony reached the shore; but his

"medicine," torn from his neck in the struggle, was swept away. There was no argument for a search. In the turbid toss of that ten-mile current the "medicine" was as hopelessly lost as though it had exhaled.

And yet, while the Lone Wolf could relate this blameless story of his vanished "medicine," it availed him naught. There is no such word as accident where one's "medicine" is concerned. One's separation from it, no matter by what means brought about, is neither to be honourably accounted for nor condoned. One has lost one's "medicine"; and one is thereby and therefore destroyed. It would be a stain, as even the half-opened paleface eye may see, were it taken from one by the conquering arm of a foe. It is as deep a stain to part with it, as the Lone Wolf parted with his. Such manner of loss makes plain that, because of crimes or cowardices unknown, the justice-loving ghosts have interfered to strip a villain of this basic requisite of a warrior and an honest man. Only in this way can the ghosts of good Cheyennes gone before, having the honour of their tribe in dearest mind, furnish word to their children of him in their midst, so flagrantly vile that a least association with him provides disgrace, while bordering narrowly on actual sin itself.

In a far day a leper cloaked his head and hung a tinkling bell at his girdle, so that hale men might have

warning of his evil case and hold aloof. For kindred reasons the Lone Wolf, when now his "medicine" was lost, killed his pony, broke his pipe-stem, and blackened his face. In this sorrowful guise he went afoot the long journey to his home village on the Cimarron, and all who met him by the way knew him at sight and turned their backs upon him, for that thing below a caste, a man who has lost his "medicine."

The Lone Wolf's "medicine" had been an exceeding strong "medicine," and this served to give his loss an emphasis. He had worn it through a dozen battles, and it so cunningly protected him that, while others fell about him knocked over like ninepins, nothing save and except one bullet from a Gatling was able to leave its mark upon him. The Gatling had nicked him; and the furrow it turned was visible on the cheek of Lone Wolf. This untoward scratch was solvable only upon a theory that the "medicine" of what paleface fired the shot must likewise have possessed uncommon potentialities.

When boyhood ceased for the Lone Wolf and he trembled on the threshold of existence as a full-blown buck, in deference to Cheyenne custom he had wandered abroad and alone upon the blizzard-whipped plains, and frozen and starved and prayed and mourned for seven nights and days. In the end, cold and hunger and self-hypnotism did their work, and the Lone Wolf began to see

shapes and hear voices. These told him how to compound his "medicine," so that thereafter he should be wise as the owl in peace, fierce as the eagle in strife.

The "medicine" bag was to be sewed from the skin of an otter, dressed with claws and tail and head and teeth as though filled with grinning life. Inside the otter-pelt "medicine" bag were to be hidden charmed tobacco, slips of sacred cedar, a handful of periwinkle shells, as well as twenty other occult odds and ends, the recondite whole, together with the otter-skin pouch, to be and remain his "medicine" forevermore.

The Lone Wolf followed, religiously, the ghostly directions. He caught and skinned and tanned and sewed his otter, and then invested the precious bag with those chronicled weird fragments of matter. To these latter, as all must admit, the lip of bat, and toe of toad, and eye of newt—so valuable in witchcraft—or the negro necromancer's dried snake's head, and left hind foot of a graveyard rabbit killed in the dark of the moon, are as children's toys; and so thought the Lone Wolf. When complete, he hung his "medicine" about his neck, and felt himself a proud, big warrior and a man. He had never been parted from it, were it day or night, or war or peace. He had even worn it during his school days at Carlisle, saving it from curious professors, who might

have decried it as some heathen fetish, by wearing it under his calico shirt. Now it was gone, eaten up by the hungry Beaver, and the name of the Lone Wolf had been dropped from all the aboriginal roll calls of good repute. Not alone among the Cheyennes, but in the estimation of every Indian that yelped between the Yellowstone and the Rio Grande, the unlucky Lone Wolf, with a lost "medicine" bag to his discredit, was utterly abandoned and undone.

And the worst feature of the case was that the Lone Wolf could not make a new "medicine." Since the Great Spirit invented the institution of "medicine" and placed it upon earth, all men have known that one may create his "medicine" but once. Any second attempt serves only to introduce one to a covey of malevolent spirits, whose power will be exercised to wet one's bowstring, blunt one's arrow, lame one's pony, and break one's lance. No, the Lone Wolf could not make another "medicine."

Was there no hope for the Lone Wolf?

About an even century before the Lone Wolf slumped into that quicksand crossing of the Beaver, and was robbed by the waters of his otter-skin "medicine," Mr. Goldsmith wrote a three act oratorio, called it "The Captivity" and sold it to Dodsley for ten guineas. Among other tuneful commodities in said oratorio contained, Mr. Goldsmith penned the following:

The wretch condemned with life to part,
Still, still on hope relies ;
And every pang that rends the heart
Bids expectation rise.

Hope, like the gleaming taper's light,
Adorns and cheers our way ;
And still as darker grows the night,
Emits a brighter ray.

Since he knew neither the one nor the other, it is fair to assume that when Mr. Goldsmith wrote the above he was thinking as deeply on the Lone Wolf as on you. Certainly the habit of hope therein set forth is as prevalently sweeping among savages as among civilised folk. The Indian does not hope for the same things, but to what extent and in what direction his anticipations stray he hopes as industriously as ever hoped any white man of you all. And so it was with the unhappy Lone Wolf. In this, his darkest hour, there remained the glimmer of a hope.

When the Great Spirit fixed his commands against making a second "medicine," a fiat necessary lest a "medicine" easily replaced degenerate to be a trivial gewgaw creature of small moment, he left open, should one lose one's "medicine," a single gateway of relief.

One might conquer, in such pinch, an enemy, strip him of his personal "medicine," and thus redeem one's self. The "medicine" of that dead foe would take the place of the lost "medicine," and by its virtues rehabilitate the victor and restore him unto what tribal place was his before his own original "medicine" had disappeared.

In this black hour of his fortunes, the Lone Wolf upheld his heart with this. He might go north, and knock over some casual Pawnee or inadvertent Sioux. Hundreds of these at this season would be met with among the buffaloes. True, it would be a long, hard trail; but not so long nor so hard as the life-trail of the Lone Wolf when now he was without caste or tribal countenance.

Stripping himself of feathers and hawk-bells and bearclaw necklace and every form of ornament, wrapped in his raggedest blanket, with a daub of mud in his hair as one who mourns, without word or sign to any concerning his purpose, the Lone Wolf turned his back on the Cimarron and wended northward. His face paints were black, for his heart was sad. The only matters about him that did not tell of woe and bankruptcy, and warn one of an Indian without fortune or future, were his pony and his arms. These showed of the best, and this weapon-care was not without a reason. More than ever would the Lone Wolf require a pony tireless as the storm and as swift, and lance and bow and knife with-

out flaw or fault; for now when he had lost his "medicine," he was singularly undefended and weak. No one knew better these latter helpless truths than did the Lone Wolf. It was by no means sure that a child might not overcome him—he who, but a fortnight before with his otter-skin "medicine," had been a thunderbolt of war. Wherefore, with his heart little, his courage water, his bow an arc of weakness, his arrows no better than windle-straws, and his lance as forceless as a cornstalk—for losing one's "medicine" means all these greivous conditions of undefence and inability to smite—it behooved the Lone Wolf to provide as much as he might, with prudence and farsighted care, in favour of a possible success.

The Lone Wolf would have no help from the good ghosts, for these had left him with the lost "medicine." What ghosts might still be riding in his disgraceful company, were bad ghosts. So far as they did anything they would do harm, not good, and the best he might look for at their hands was a sort of ghostly non-interference.

There was a least slant ray to encourage the latter hope. If the Lone Wolf had the luck to cross up with a Pawnee or a Sioux as contemptible as himself, the ghosts would not choose between them. In such miserable coil of coyote-snap-coyote, the disgusted ghosts

would stand afar off. They would be content with the outcome, whatever it was, and refuse to contaminate their vapourish hands by mixing in the business.

That was the one favouring chance that lay before the Lone Wolf. To have full advantage of it, he wore his best weapons and rode his best war pony. If he happened upon a Pawnee or Sioux, disreputable in the eyes of gods and men, he might yet be saved from out those fires of disgrace that were consuming him. He would kill that Pawnee or Sioux, and wash himself free of stain with his victim's "medicine."

On the other and more likely hand—since good is more rife than evil—were he to encounter an Indian, tribally eminent and high, one who stood well with his people and of whose company therefore the most exactingly exclusive ghost need not feel ashamed, the Lone Wolf knew the upcome. His fate was written; he was no better than a dead Cheyenne. To these poor conditions the Lone Wolf tacitly agreed. And wherefore no? What death was not preferable to a life of endless ignominy—the life of one who has lost his "medicine?" Such indeed were the thoughts to skulk in the mind of the Lone Wolf like quails in corn, as he rode forward on his quest.

The Lone Wolf could not expect to find that required Pawnee or needed Sioux short of the Platte or perhaps the Yellowstone. He resolved to go thither by way of

Dodge. The Lone Wolf was not wanting in a kind of sapiency. Now that his own weapons were undeniably weak—he could only know how weak when he had tried them, and the news might come too late—he decided to purchase a rifle of the palefaces. Such a weapon would not have been sapped of its powers by any former possession of his own, and he might possibly corral that “medicine” he sought before it had been long enough in his hands to have degenerated. With this wisdom in mind, the Lone Wolf drove before him two pack ponies, laden to the ears of robes and furs. This sumpter stuff would buy that rifle, with its accompanying belts and cartridges.

The Lone Wolf knew Mr. Masterson, and liked him. They had both fought at the 'Dobe Walls and gained a deal of respect for one another. Also they had met since at sundry agencies; and in good truth it was the Lone Wolf who told Mr. Masterson how many of those charging savages went under in that hot fortnight of fight.

“How many of you did we blink out?” asked Mr. Masterson, who had his statistical side.

The Lone Wolf's mathematics were wholly aboriginal, for all he had been to Carlisle. He opened and closed his ten fingers eight times—eighty. Then he held up one finger.

"Buffalo soldier," said the Lone Wolf.

The one finger stood for that traitorous black bugler, who fought for the side of the Indians and sounded rally and charge on his stolen bugle, the property of the state. The Indians style such "buffalo soldiers" because of their woolly heads like unto the curled frontlet of a buffalo bull.

Having decided upon that rifle and its acquirement, the Lone Wolf would go seeking his new "medicine" by way of Dodge. He would inquire out Mr. Masterson and crave his aid in the rifle's selection. This was highly important. Some bad paleface might otherwise sell him a gun that was bewitched. Mr. Masterson would protect him from that fearful risk. Mr. Masterson was an honest man. No one could fight as Mr. Masterson had fought, unless his heart were very pure and strong.

The only drawback to a visit to Dodge lurked in this that it would compel the Lone Wolf to speak English. Surely, he had learned English at Carlisle; but knowing, as know all Indians, that to speak the white man's language brings misfortune and sickness and death, he had had the wit to discontinue the practice. Likewise and at the same time he laid aside his paleface clothes as being extremely "bad medicine." Of course, there was also a commonsense side to the latter move, since anyone who sticks to coat and trousers when, without shaking his

position, he may be freely comfortable in breech-clout and blanket, is an unimaginable ass. Yes; in Dodge the Lone Wolf would be driven to speak English. However, it would not last for long, and in the desolate pitch of his fortune, what mattered it what he spoke? It would mean companionship, and therefore a kind of comfort; for your Indian is as gregarious as a prairie dog, and the Lone Wolf—who had not spoken to buck or squaw or pappoose since he lost his “medicine”—was beginning to feel as solitary and as lonesome as a good man in Chicago.

Six months before the Lone Wolf lost his “medicine” in the Beaver, there had come to the Dodge Opera House that dramatic organization known as the Red Stocking Blondes. The advent of this talented combination was hailed with local delight, for it had ever been a favourite in Dodge.

The first violin of the Red Stocking Blondes, on this particular occasion, was not the individual whom Mr. Wagner roped on a former memorable evening. This first violin was thoroughly the artist. What he couldn't coax from a fiddle in the way of melody would have to be developed by an Ole Bull.

Once, Cimarron Bill, after listening to several of the first violin's most unstudied performances, had asked:

“Can you play the Bootiful Bloo Danyoob? I hears it ’leven years ago in St. Looey, an’ have been honin’ for it ever since.”

The artist, thus appealed to, played that swelling piece of waltz music, and when he finished, the emotional Cimarron, eyes a-swim with tears of ecstasy, grasped his hand.

“Pard!” exclaimed the worthy Cimarron, in a gush of hyperbole, “you could play a fiddle with your feet!” However, this is in advance of the story.

The first violin of the Red Stocking Blondes was named Algernon Pepin, albeit this may have been a *nom de théâtre*. Mr. Pepin was small, lean, shy, silent, timid, with a long, sad, defeated face. His back was humped, as were the backs of Aesop, Richard of Gloster, the poet Pope, and many another gentleman of genius. He had rakehandle arms, and skinny fingers like the claws of a great bird.

Of all who marched with the banners of the Red Stocking Blondes, Mr. Pepin, when they came into Dodge, was the only one troubled of spirit. The rest showed as gay as larks; for the troupe was on the road to Broadway, and six weeks more would find its members in Rector’s, Shanley’s, Brown’s and Lüchow’s, relating their adventures to guileless ones who had never crossed the Hudson. It was that thought of Broadway to pale the

sallow, anxious cheek of Mr. Pepin. And the reason of the terror which tugged at his soul was this:

Two years rearward Mr. Pepin, by several fortunate strokes and the aid of a legacy, had made himself master of an opera company. It was one of those terrible opera companies that sing Wagner and are both fashionable and awful to hear.

The contralto of the opera company was a large, powerful woman whose name ended in "ski." Her upper lip was distinctly mustached, and her voice sounded like a man in a cistern. There are, in divers parts of Europe, just such beings as this contralto who, yoked with cattle, assist in agriculture by pulling plows. This happy condition, however, is confined to Europe; here they sing in Wagner.

Any lady of the theaters will tell you there is advantage in being the wife of the owner of the show. It means spotlights, music, three-sheets, puffs; in short the center of the stage. The contralto in question was wholly aware of these advantages. Acting on that knowledge, this formidable woman arose one New York morning, conveyed Mr. Pepin to the Little Church Around the Corner, almost with force and arms, and married him to her for better or for worse. It turned out to be the latter alternative in the dismal case of Mr. Pepin.

There came a time when the opera company fell upon

poor days. Then the days went from poor to bad and bad to worse. Lastly, came the crash. At the close of a losing week the treasurer fled with the receipts, and a host of creditors, the sheriff at their hungry head, tore Mr. Pepin into insolvent bits. When the dust of that last fierce struggle had subsided, Mr. Pepin crawled from the wreck with two fiddles and the necessity of beginning life anew.

Mr. Pepin, at that time, would have said that he had nothing further to fear from fate. Ill-fortune, he would have argued, had shot its bolt and done its worst. Most folk, after an unbiased review, would have coincided with Mr. Pepin. Also, most folk, like Mr. Pepin, would be wrong, since they would have overlooked that fell contralto.

When the opera company went to grief, and with it her position, the contralto scrupled not to revile Mr. Pepin. She even taunted him with his misshapen back. Then she beat him. When he ran from her and concealed himself, she charged him with abandonment and cruelty, and the police dragged Mr. Pepin from his place of hiding.

One day by some masterly sleight, Mr. Pepin escaped, and went fiddling forth into the land. He was not after position; salary was no object; the one purpose of Mr. Pepin was to keep out of New York and thereby out of

the clutches of his contralto, for whom—since she never left that metropolis—New York had become the dread synonym. You who read may now consider how far Mr. Pepin was justified of his shudders at the mention of Broadway.

Two days prior to the coming of those Red Stocking Blondes, Mr. Peacock's Dance Hall had suffered an orchestral setback. In the midst of the evening's gayety five couples presented themselves in the formation of one quadrille—a manifest solecism!

Mr. Peacock, alive to the dangerous impropriety described, warned the musicians, by a repressive gesture of his hand, not to strike up. Had Mr. Peacock's signals been heeded there would have been no trouble in the Dance Hall, for the gentlemen concerned would have either adjusted their differences by tossing a copper or gone outside to shoot.

But the signals of Mr. Peacock were not obeyed. The violinist of the Dance Hall was one of your ill-conditioned natures that dislike a quiet life. Observing those five couple where only four should be, and careless of the pantomime of Mr. Peacock, with a brief exultant remark to the pianist that he thought he saw in the snarl the rudiments of trouble, the violinist went ranting off into the "Arkansas Traveler" and dragged the pianist along.

Somewhere it has been put forth—and the assertion has had solemn acceptance to this day—that the man was a public benefactor who made two blades of grass grow where but one had grown before. However much this may be of value as a statement concerning grass, it fails when one attempts its application to quadrilles. Instead of benefiting the public, he who sought to make two couples dance where but one had danced before, would simply be laying the foundations of civil war. And this in particular were the scene of his operations Mr. Peacock's Dance Hall in the hour borne in mind.

And so the sequel showed. That malignant violinist, when he plowed off into the "Arkansas Traveler"—to which music, be it known, more men have perished than to the "British Grenadier"—he gave the fatal call:

"First four forward and back!"

The "First Four" on this overloaded occasion, carrying as it did that extra couple and being not four but six, fell at once into a general knot. Upon the knot growing worse instead of better, those therein involved attempted to untie it with their guns.

It was over in a moment, with a gratifying count of one killed and none wounded. The word "gratifying" is used, because the one killed was that troublemongering violinist who, with his "Arkansas Traveler," had shoved the row from shore. Justice is blind, and now

and then an accident may be counted upon to do an equity.

While every right-thinking soul in Dodge felt glad that the malignant violinist was killed, his blotting out none the less became a common injury. There was no one to put in his place; which, it may be said in passing, furnished the precise reason why he had not been shot before.

Now a violinist was a highly important personage in Dodge. Your cowboy, after the sixth drink, is a being of mood and romance—a dreamy sentimentalist! He requires the violin, as the Jewish king required the harp, and nothing else will soothe him. Wherefore, while Mr. Peacock's pianist—he had lived through that overstocked quadrille untouched—might hammer out a dance tune, the atmosphere was sorely lacking in those calmative elements which only a violin could give. It offered a state of affairs especially hectic and explosive, one which the cooler spirits must watch in order to preserve a peace.

The dead violinist was buried on the day when the Red Stocking Blondes came to town, and it is safe to assume that those funeral doings taught Mr. Pepin, by the gossip they provoked, of the refuge for himself and fortunes which those obsequies inferred. Whether that be so or no, at the end of the week when the Red

Stocking Blondes closed their brilliant engagement and on the breath of Dodge's plaudits were wafted to the next stand, Mr. Pepin remained behind. He lapsed into that bullet-constructed vacancy in Mr. Peacock's Dance Hall, while his light companions of the theater set their faces eastward, singing:

"The sun is always shining on Broadway."

One can imagine a war that would have obliterated, but not one that would have conquered Dodge. Mere force could never have brought it to its knees; and yet within a week it had unconditionally surrendered to the melodious genius of Mr. Pepin. He enraptured Dodge. It took him to its heart; it would have defended him to the latest gasp. Mr. Pepin repayed this local worship. Never had he drawn sweeter strains from his instrument; for never, of late at least, had his heart been more protected and at perfect ease.

Also, the musical taste of Dodge was elevated by Mr. Pepin. In this taste improvement, Mr. Pepin showed himself equipped of tact, and a wary wit. He played selections from "Trovatore" and "Martha," and rendered Mendelssohn's "Spring Song," and "Old Madrid." But he renamed them—in favour of local colour, prob-

ably—"Midnight Along the Arkansas," "Two Black Bears," "The Fieste at Santa Fé," and "Daybreak On the Plains." This was a sagacious nomenclature; it plowed 'round suspicion, and avoided prejudices that otherwise might have been invoked.

When the Red Stocking Blondes departed for the East, Mr. Pepin severally swore every member of that organisation to say nothing of his whereabouts to the contralto, and it is creditable to the dramatic profession that every member kept the oath. Mr. Pepin, released from bondage and doubly safe with distance and an address that was now suppressed, might have scraped an unscared fiddle to the ending of his days, had it not been for his own loquacity—a loquacity that was brought about in this wise.

Mr. Pepin had dwelt in Dodge, and been the soul of those revels that found nightly place in Mr. Peacock's Dance Hall, for divers months, when the town dedicated its first church. The event was epoch-making, and Dodge, impressed as to what onward and upward strides were suggested of that day, gave way to vast rejoicing. A deal of Old Jordan was destroyed, and Mr. Pepin, contrary to a usual habit, was among those overcome. Most of Mr. Pepin's liquor was consumed in the Alhambra; for he and Mr. Kelly—who owned a musical ear—had become as brothers.

There is a proverb which says *In vino veritas*, and talks of truth in wine. This is manifest mistake. Intoxication is the very seed of mendacity, and a drunken man is always and everywhere a liar. After the tenth drink, Mr. Pepin and Mr. Kelly communed together affectionately, and Mr. Pepin told Mr. Kelly of the contralto. He spoke of the domestic affections, said it was the one sorrow of his life that the contralto wasn't with him in Dodge, and bewept a poverty which separated them. He explained that if Mr. Kelly could but see his heart he might then gain some glimmer of the grief that fed upon it. Mr. Pepin cried profoundly, and Mr. Kelly, who loved him, united his sobs to Mr. Pepin's. Controlling his grief, Mr. Pepin averred that he lived only for a day when, having accumulated what treasure was necessary for the enterprise, he could bring his contralto to Dodge, and show that aggregation of bumpkins what a real lady was like. Then Mr. Pepin went to sleep with his head on a poker table, and forgot every word he had spoken to Mr. Kelly.

Mr. Kelly had a better memory; he was capable of more liquor than was Mr. Pepin. And he was Mr. Pepin's friend. Mr. Kelly resolved upon a sentimental surprise. He would restore that contralto to the arms and heart of Mr. Pepin. The latter should not wait upon the painful, slow achievement of what funds were called for.

Mr. Kelly had money ; and to what better purpose, pray, can one's money be put than a promotion of the happiness of a friend? Mr. Kelly had jotted down the lady's address—being that of a dramatic agency—as furnished drunkenly by Mr. Pepin, and he now wired her to come at once. Mr. Kelly benevolently closed his message with:

“If you're broke, draw on me for five hundred.”

Having accomplished so much, Mr. Kelly as a reward of merit bestowed upon himself a huge drink. Then he gave himself up to those feelings of self-approval that come blandly to souls engaged upon virtuous works.

The day next but one after sending his message, Mr. Kelly received the following from the contralto:

“Have drawn for five hundred. Will start for Dodge in a week.”

In the beginning, Mr. Kelly had planned to keep the joy in store for Mr. Pepin a secret from that virtuoso. Mr. Pepin was to know nothing of the bliss that was being arranged for him. His earliest information should come when Mr. Kelly led him to the Wright House, where his contralto was awaiting him with parted lips and outstretched, loving hands.

“Which I'll nacherally bring down heaven on him

like a pan of milk from a top shelf!" quoth the excellent Mr. Kelly.

As stated, this was the plan; but after receiving the contralto's message, Mr. Kelly decided upon amendments. It would be safer, when all was said, to let Mr. Pepin hear of the contralto and her coming. Mr. Pepin was a frail man; a sudden joy might strike him dead. Mr. Kelly had heard of such cases. Not to invite any similar catastrophe in the fragile instance of Mr. Pepin, Mr. Kelly took him aside and told him of the happiness ahead. He was ten minutes in the telling, rolling the blessed secret beneath his tongue, until the last possible moment, like a sweet morsel.

Mr. Pepin, rendered mute by his peril, said never a word. He read the contralto's message and then fell into a chair—glazed of eye and pale of cheek. Mr. Kelly poured whiskey down Mr. Pepin, laying his faintness to bliss. Mr. Pepin was at last so far recovered that he could walk. But his eyes roved wildly, like the eyes of a trapped animal, and how he fiddled through the night he never knew.

Nature preserves herself by equilibriums. He who will stop and think must see that this is so. Wherever there is danger there is defence, a poison means an antidote and the distillery and the rattlesnake go hand in hand. The day of Mr. Kelly's headlong breaking into

the domestic affairs of Mr. Pepin, was the day upon which the Lone Wolf came into Dodge. The Lone Wolf lost no time, but sought out Mr. Masterson. His ragged blanket and blackened face must be explained, and the Lone Wolf told Mr. Masterson of his lost "medicine." Moreover, he set forth his design of presently potting that Pawnee or Sioux, and sequestering, *de bene esse*, the dead person's "medicine."

Mr. Masterson spoke against this latter scheme; to carry it out would betray the Lone Wolf into all sorts and fashions of trouble. The Lone Wolf's Great Father in Washington objected to these unauthorized homicides, and would send the walkaheaps or the pony-soldiers from the Fort upon the trail of the Lone Wolf.

As against this, the Lone Wolf showed that he was even then in all sorts and fashions of trouble by reason of his lost "medicine," and nothing the Great Father did could add to it. What was he, the Lone Wolf, to do? He must have a "medicine." He could not make a new one, for the Great Spirit had passed commands against it. He could not buy one, for every Indian urgently needed his "medicine" in his own affairs, and when he died it must be buried with him since he would then need it more than ever. There was no other solution. He must knock out the brains of that Pawnee or Sioux of whom he was in pursuit. There would

then be an extra "medicine" on earth, and he might claim it.

Mr. Masterson owned a fertile intelligence; a bright thought came to him. He told the Lone Wolf that he knew one who was the chief of all medicine men, and master of the mightiest "medicines." This personage, by a most marvellous chance, had an extra "medicine." Mr. Masterson was sure that if the need were properly presented, his friend the Lone Wolf could buy this "medicine." The Lone Wolf would then, in that matter of a "medicine," to quote from Mr. Masterson, "have every other Cheyenne too dead to skin."

Mr. Masterson conveyed the Lone Wolf to Mr. Peacock's Dance Hall, and called his attention to Mr. Pepin, who, made desperate by the peep into a contralto-filled future which the kindness of Mr. Kelly had afforded him, was fiddling as he n'er fiddled before. The Lone Wolf gazed planet-smitten. Even without the spotless word of Mr. Masterson, he would have known by the hump on his shoulders—that especial mark of the Great Spirit's favour!—how Mr. Pepin was a most tremendous medicine man. Neither was it needed that Mr. Masterson instruct him as to the prodigious qualities of the resounding "medicine" which Mr. Pepin fondled. The Lone Wolf could hear the wailing and sobbing and singing of the scores of ghosts—as many as four screaming at once!—

that dwelt therein, and whose sensibilities Mr. Pepin worked upon with the wand in his right hand.

Between dances, that gentleman being at leisure, Mr. Masterson made Mr. Pepin acquainted with the Lone Wolf, and set forth—winking instructively the while—the sore dilemma of his Cheyenne friend. Mr. Masterson explained that he had told the Lone Wolf about an extra “medicine” whereof he, Mr. Pepin, was endowed. Would Mr. Pepin, from his charity and goodness, sell this priceless “medicine” to the Lone Wolf, and lift him out of that abyss into which he had fallen?

Mr. Pepin owned an extra violin, that was not a good violin and therefore out of commission. It abode in a black, oblong box, like a little coffin. Being the kindest of souls, he declined the thought of sale, and said that he would give it to Mr. Masterson’s friend, the Lone Wolf. He took it from its case, which on being opened displayed an advantageous lining of red. The Lone Wolf received it reverently, smelled to it, peered through the slashes in its bosom, placed it to his ear, and then with a kind of awe turned to Mr. Pepin. Was this “medicine” also full of ghosts? Mr. Pepin took it and bowfully showed him that it was a very hive of ghosts.

The Lone Wolf declared that he would receive this inestimable “medicine” from Mr. Pepin. To simply handle it had given him a good heart. Its mere touch,

to say nothing of the voices of those ghosts imprisoned in its cherry coloured belly, cheered him and thrilled him as had no other "medicine." He would return to his people, and scowl in every man's face. His squaws should again hold up their heads, his papposes cease their crying. His dogs' tails should proudly curl aloft, and his ponies snort contempt for the broncos of feebler folk. Altogether the Lone Wolf pictured for himself a balmy future. In conclusion, the grateful Lone Wolf set forth that, while he was proud to take this wondrous "medicine" as a gift, he must still bestow those pack ponies, with their cargoes of robes and furs, upon Mr. Pepin, who was his heart's brother.

The Lone Wolf told Mr. Masterson that he would put in the balance of the evening in Mr. Peacock's Dance Hall. He desired to sit by the side of his heart's brother and listen to the talk of his "medicine." Mr. Pepin instructed the Lone Wolf how he might bind that precious fiddle-case to his shoulders with straps, and wear it like a knapsack. The Lone Wolf, being thus adorned, gave himself a new title. He was no more the Lone Wolf; he had lost that name in the Beaver with his old "medicine." He had become "The-Man-who-packs-his-medicine-on-his-back."

After the Dance Hall revels were done, being alone together, the Lone Wolf and Mr. Pepin fell into closer

talk. Two days later, no one could have found Mr. Pepin with a search warrant. The Lone Wolf, too, had disappeared.

When Dodge realised the spiriting away of Mr. Pepin, a howl, not to say a hue and cry, went up. In the woeful midst of the excitement, Mr. Kelly informed the world of his negotiations with the contralto. This news created the utmost consternation.

"It was that which run him out o' camp," said Cimarron Bill, referring to the departed Mr. Pepin. "You've stampeded him by sendin' for his wife."

Dodge could not but look coldly upon Mr. Kelly for his foolish header into the household affairs of Mr. Pepin. And there was a serious side: the contralto had said she would start for Dodge in a week. When she arrived, and Mr. Kelly could not produce Mr. Pepin, what would be her course? Dodge could not guess; it could only shudder. In her resentment the contralto might marry Mr. Kelly. Cimarron Bill expressed a hope that she would. He said that such an upcome would punish Mr. Kelly as well as offer safety to Dodge.

"For that lady's disapp'intment," said Cimarron Bill, "is goin' to be frightful; an' if ever she turns loose once, thar'll be nothin' for Dodge to do but adjourn *sine die*."

Mr. Kelly had lived long on the border and was a resourceful man. He saw the dangers that surrounded

him, and appreciated, as he phrased it, that he "was out on a limb." He must act without delay, or there was no measuring the calamities that might overtake him. Thank heaven! the contralto would not start for three full days. There was still time, if Mr. Kelly moved rapidly. Mr. Kelly wired the contralto

"Your husband dropped dead with joy on hearing you were coming. You may keep the money."

Mr. Masterson, to whom he read this message, approved it, and said that it did Mr. Kelly credit. At Mr. Masterson's suggestion, Mr. Kelly added the inquiry,

"Shall I ship body to New York?"

as calculated to allay doubts.

Both Mr. Kelly and Dodge breathed more freely when the contralto replied, expressed her tearful thanks, and said that, as to shipment suggested, Mr. Kelly needn't mind.

"An' you can gamble, Bat," observed Mr. Kelly, solemnly, "it's the last time I'll open a correspondence, that a-way, with another gent's wife."

It was during the frosts of a next autumn that Mr. Masterson, in his official character, was over on the Cimarron looking for stolen horses. He decided upon a

visit to Bear Shield's band, since stolen horses among the Cheyennes were not without a precedent.

In the earlier hours of an evening full of moonlight and natural peace, Mr. Masterson came into Bear Shield's village through a yelping skirmish line of dogs. As he rode leisurely forward, he could hear above the howling of the dogs the "Tunk, tunk!" of a native drum, which is not a drum but a tomtom. As he drew slowly nearer, the "Hy yah! hy yah! hy!" of savage singing taught an experienced intelligence that the Cheyennes were holding a dance. This was not surprising; the Cheyennes, when not hunting nor robbing nor scalping, are generally holding a dance.

And yet the situation was not lacking in elements of amazement. The "Tunk! tunk!" and the "Hy yah! hy yah! hy!" Mr. Masterson could explain, for he had heard them many times. But over and under and through them all ran a thin, wailing note which would have been understandable in a hurdy-gurdy, but fell strangely not to say fantastically upon the ear when heard in an Indian village among the cottonwoods, with the whispering soft rush of the Cimarron to bear it company.

Full of curiosity, and yet with a half guess, Mr. Masterson threw himself from the saddle and made his way through the circle of spectators that were as a frame

for the dance. There, in good sooth! sat Mr. Pepin, flourishing a tuneful bow. He was giving them the "Gypsy Chorus," while an Indian drummer beat out the time on his tomtom. Back of Mr. Pepin were squatted a half dozen young squaws, who furnished the "Hy yah! hy!" It cannot be said that these fair vocalists closely followed the score as written by Mr. Balfe; but they struck all about him, and since time was perfect the dancers skated and crouched and towered and leaped and crept thereunto with the utmost éclat.

Mr. Masterson moved into a position where he might have the moonlight full upon Mr. Pepin. That lost genius was indeed a splendid spectacle! His hair exhibited a plumy bristle of feathers, while the paints on his face offered a colour scheme by the dazzling side of which the most brilliant among the Cheyennes dwindled into dreary failure.

After the dance, Mr. Masterson talked with Mr. Pepin. It was as Mr. Masterson had surmised; in his despair at the threatened coming of the contralto, and having advantage of the Lone Wolf's new friendship, Mr. Pepin had thrown himself upon the Cheyennes. They received him most decorously, for the Lone Wolf made a speech that opened their eyes. The Lone Wolf had exhibited his new "medicine," and requested Mr. Pepin to make the ghosts talk, which he did. The

hunch on Mr. Pepin's back was also a mighty endorsement. It was as the signature of the Great Spirit, and bespoke for him an instant Cheyenne vogue. Bear Shield became his friend; the Lone Wolf continued to be his heart's brother. He was given a lodge. Then Bear Shield bestowed upon him his daughter Red Bud to be his wife.

Mr. Pepin confessed that he might have hesitated at this final honour, but the thoroughgoing Bear Shield accompanied the gift of the blooming Red Bud with a fine elm club. The two went ever together, Bear Shield said, and explained the marital possibilities of the elm club. Mr. Pepin had always heard how there was a per cent. of good among every sort and sept of men. He could now bear witness that the Cheyennes nourished views concerning matrimony, and the rights of husband and wife, for which much might be said.

Mr. Pepin did not wish to return to the whites; the Indians were devoid of contraltos. The Lone Wolf filled his lodge with buffalo beef and robes. By way of receiving return, he came once a week, and asked his heart's brother to make the ghosts in his "medicine" tell him their impressions. Under Mr. Pepin's spell the ghosts were sure to talk hopefully and with courageous optimism. Their usual discourse took the form of "Johnny Comes Marching Home," or "The Girl I

Left Behind Me.” These never failed to make the Lone Wolf’s heart both bold and good.

Mr. Masterson presently met the Lone Wolf. That warrior was wearing his fiddle-case “medicine” on his back, after the manner of a squaw carrying her papoose. The Lone Wolf had a prideful look which he held was one of the beneficent effects of his “medicine.” He confided to Mr. Masterson that Mr. Pepin’s Cheyenne name was a rumbling procession of gutturals that, translated, meant “The-toad-that-sings-like-a-thrush.”

CHAPTER X.

THE INTUITIONS OF MR. ALLISON.

FOR a moment the signs promised hugely of smoke and flying lead and sudden death, and the interest of Dodge was awakened. Later, when the episode had been thoroughly searched, it grew to be the popular conclusion that the affair was wholly of the surface. Mr. Allison himself said that he was saved in a manner occult, and not to be understood, and explained how his intuitions warned him of a pending peril. Had it not been for those warning impressions, which he insisted came from guardian spirits interested for his safety, Mr. Allison held that the business might have taken on a serious not to say a sanguinary hue.

Cimarron Bill declined the theory of guardian spirits as maintained by Mr. Allison; he took the blame of that gentleman's escape upon himself.

"Clay never got no speritual hunch," said Cimarron. "Which it was my own ontimely cur'osity that give

him warnin'. I'm in the Long Branch at the time, an' nacherally, after gettin' Bat's word, I keep pro-troodin' my head a whole lot, expectin' every minute's goin' to be Clay's next; an' he ups an' notices it."

Mr. Short joined with Cimarron, and expressed a skepticism as to Mr. Allison having been bucklered by disembodied influences.

"I never did go a foot," concluded Mr. Short, "on speritualism, with its table-tippin' an' its ghost-dancin'. Cimarron's argument sounds a heap more feasible. In my opinion, Clay saw thar was a hen on by Cimarron's face."

"You can gamble a handful of reds," remarked Cimarron Bill, disgustedly, "he sees it in my face. Which it'll be a lesson to me to hide myse'f the next time one of them Las Animas terrors comes bulgin' into camp, ontill Bat's added him to the list. I shore won't sp'ile another sech a layout by bein' prematoorly inquisitive that a-way."

"Well," returned Mr. Masterson, with whom Mr. Short and Cimarron Bill were in talk, "whether Clay was saved by spirits, or by just his own horse sense, I'm glad it ended as it did."

The chances favour the assumption that, had Mr. Masterson been up and about, the trouble would have had no beginning. In that event he would have been more or

less in the company of Mr. Allison. Such a spectacle, while it might not instruct the mean intelligence of the Ground Owl, would have at least advised his caution. He would have gained therefrom some glint of Mr. Allison's position in the world, and refrained from insults which, when the latter reviewed them by the light of liquor afterwards obtained, sent him on the wretched Ground Owl's trail.

Those differences between Mr. Allison and the Ground Owl began at the Wright House breakfast table. They did not culminate, however, until late in the morning, and when, commonly, Mr. Masterson would have been abroad about his duty. But the night before had been a trying one for Mr. Masterson. He was employed until broad day in keeping Mr. McBride from slaying Bobby Gill, and never sought his blankets until an hour after dawn.

Mr. McBride had been a brother scout with Mr. Masterson in the Cheyenne wars. Later he came to Dodge, as he said, to "quiet down." In carrying out his plan of quieting down, Mr. McBride espoused and took to wife, one Bridget, who for years had been recognised as the official scold of Dodge.

In an elder day, Bridget would have graced a ducking-stool. Dodge, however, owned no such instrument of correction. Neither, save during the June rise, was there a sufficient depth of water in the Arkansas to make a

ducking-stool effective. Mr. McBride following marriage lived in terror of Bridget's awful tongue, which served him right, so people said, for having been a fool.

At the end of their first wedded year, that is to say upon the third day prior to the trouble between Mr. Allison and the Ground Owl, Mr. McBride, by some lucky thick-skull utterance as to what should be a government policy touching Cheyennes, incurred the contempt of Bridget. The word "lucky" is employed because the contempt induced was beyond power of words to express, and Bridget became so surcharged of views derogatory to Mr. McBride that she burst a blood-vessel and died. Mr. McBride's release left him in a pleasant daze. Being, however, a slave to the conventional, he did not laugh, but lapsed into lamentations, wound his sombrero with black and, with woe-lengthened visage, made ready for the last rites.

On the day of the funeral, it being the immemorial custom of Dodge to attend such ceremonies in a body, the house of Mr. McBride was full. Mr. McBride felt the tribute, and his heart swelled with excusable pride. He glanced out through his tears, and counted as present the best faces of the town.

The occasion would have been forever cherished among the proudest memories of Mr. McBride, had it not been for the untoward conduct of Bobby Gill. This latter

ignobility was the pet barbarian of Dodge, just as Bridget had been its pet virago. Also, there had existed feud between Bridget and Bobby; they had felt for one another the jealous hate of rivals. Bridget at the mere sight of Bobby Gill was wont to uncork the vitriol of her anger. She would sear him verbally, while he replied in kind, Dodge standing by to listen and admire.

Still, Bridget was never permitted a victory over Bobby. While she could say more than he could, his observations had a cutting force beyond her genius. As Mr. Kelly—who was deep in the lore of guns—observed:

“Bridget’s like a Winchester, while old Bobby’s like a Sharp’s. She can shoot faster than he can; but thar’s more powder behind what Bobby says. Also, he’s got more muzzle velocity. An’ he carries further.”

“I entertains opinions similar,” said Cimarron Bill, who as Aunt Nettie Dawson’s nephew was no mean judge of a tirade.

As Mr. McBride was feeding that pardonable vanity chronicled and flattering himself with a review of the mourning throng, Bobby Gill appeared at the door. Bobby toed in like an Indian or a pigeon, and because he walked on the ball of his foot as does the wolf, he possessed a lurking, spying manner.

Bobby came in, his wool hat held between his fingers, in a tight roll. Being in he began peeping and peering,

right and left, and craning over intervening shoulders as though to get a glimpse of the casket. Mr. McBride crossed over to Bobby with a step serious and slow:

“Bobby,” said Mr. McBride, manner gloomly firm, “you an’ Bridget never agreed, an’ you’ll obleege me by hittin’ the street.”

Bobby backed softly out. At the door, as though to vindicate the respectful innocence of his motives, he paused.

“Say, Mack,” he whispered, in mingled apology and reproach, “I only jest wanted to see was she shore dead.”

It wasn’t until late in the evening, when the sad responsibilities of the day had been lifted from his mind, that Mr. McBride became a burden upon the hands of Mr. Masterson. Mr. McBride said that he’d been insulted; the memory of Bridget he averred had met with disrespect. Thereupon he buckled on his six-shooter—which had been laid aside in funeral deference to the day—and announced an intention to hunt down Bobby Gill.

“Come, Mack!” argued Mr. Masterson, soothingly, “it isn’t creditable to you—isn’t creditable to Bridget.”

“But, Bat,” sobbed Mr. McBride, as he half-cocked his Colt’s-45, and sadly revolved the cylinder to make sure that all worked smoothly, “I’ve put up with a heap from Bobby—me and Bridget has—an’ now I’m goin’ to nacherally discontinue him a lot.”

"You oughtn't to mind old Bobby," Mr. Masterson insisted. "Everybody knows he's locoed."

"If he's locoed," Mr. McBride retorted through his grief, "I'm locoed, too. Sorrow over Bridget an' the onmerited contoomely of that old profligate has shore left me as crazy as a woman's watch. Bat, don't stop me! Which I've sot my heart on his h'ar."

Mr. Masterson was granite. There was no shaking him off. He persuaded, commanded, explained, and gave his word that Bobby Gill should make humble amends. At last, Mr. McBride, realising the inevitable, surrendered, and promised to be at peace.

"For all that, Bat," concluded Mr. McBride, with a gulp, "old Bobby's queered them obsequies for me. I can never look back on 'em now without regret."

It was the bluish dawn before Mr. Masterson felt justified in leaving the widowed Mr. McBride. He was so worn with his labours that he made no more profound arrangements for slumber than casting aside his coat and kicking off his boots. A moment later he was as sound asleep as a tree.

Mr. Masterson had been asleep four hours, when Jack broke in upon him with the rude word that Mr. Allison had "turned in to tree the town."

"You can nail him from the window," puffed Jack,

who was out of breath with hurry. "You haven't time to pull on your boots and go down. Your best hold is to get the drop on him from the window, an' when he makes a break, cut loose."

Mr. Masterson sprang from the blankets and caught up his Sharp's for the honour of Dodge. To permit Mr. Allison to give the town an unchecked shaking up would mean immortal disgrace. For all the hurry, however, Mr. Masterson had time to admire the military sagacity of Jack.

"Some day you'll make a marshal, Jack," quoth Mr. Masterson, and the "cluck-cluck!" of the buffalo gun as he cocked it served to punctuate the remark.

Some cynic, with a purpose to injure that commonwealth only equalled by his sour carelessness of truth, once said that Indiana was settled by folk who had started for the West, but lost their nerve. This is apparent slander, and not to be believed of a people who later endowed us with Ade, Tarkington, David Graham Phillips and Ben Hur. The one disgrace traceable to Indiana is that in some unguarded moment she gave birth to the Ground Owl, and sent him forth to vex the finer sentiments of Dodge. Also the Ground Owl, with his insolences, imbecilities, and feeble timidities, was the harder to bear since he never once offered the outraged public, in whose side he was the thorn, an open-

ing to be rid of him by customary lead and powder means.

The Ground Owl had come to Dodge in fear and trembling. He did not want to come, but for reasons never fathomed he couldn't remain in Indiana. It was a wholesale firm in Chicago that asked Mr. Wright to employ him as salesman in his store; and Mr. Wright, acting after those reckless business methods that obtain in the West and are a never flagging wellspring of trouble, consented without waiting to see the Ground Owl or estimate his length and breadth and depth as a communal disaster. For this blinded procedure Mr. Wright was often sorely blamed.

And yet to Mr. Masterson, rather than to Mr. Wright, should be charged the prolonged infliction of the Ground Owl's presence. Once installed behind the counters of Mr. Wright, the Ground Owl lost no time in seeking Mr. Masterson. Every Dodgeian wore a gun, and this display of force excited the Ground Owl vastly. The latent uncertainties of his surroundings alarmed him. Dodge was a volcano; an eruption might occur at any time! The air to-day was wholesome; to-morrow it might be as full of lead as the Ozarks! In this fashion vibrated the hair-hung fears of the Ground Owl, and with a cheek of chalk he sought out Mr. Masterson to canvass ways and means to best conserve his safety.

Mr. Masterson, who could hardly grasp the notion of personal cowardice on the part of any man, was shocked. However, he made no comment, evinced not the least surprise, but asked:

“You’re afraid some of the boys’ll shoot you up?”

“In some moment of excitement, you know!” returned the Ground Owl, quaveringly.

“And you want to know what to do to be saved?”

“Yes,” said the Ground Owl, attention on the strain.

“Then never pack a gun.”

Mr. Masterson explained to the Ground Owl that to slay an unarmed man, whatever the provocation, was beyond an etiquette. The West would never sink to such vulgar depths. No one, however locoed of drink, would make a target of the Ground Owl while the latter wasn’t heeled.

“Of course,” observed Mr. Masterson, by way of qualification, “you’re not to go hovering about scrimmages in which you’ve no personal concern. In that case, some of the boys might get confused and rub you out erroneously.”

That golden secret of how to grow old in the West went deep into the aspen soul of the Ground Owl. As its direct fruit he would as soon take arsenic as belt on a pistol. There was a faulty side, however, to the Masterson suggestion. In time, realising an immunity, the

Ground Owl grew confident; and the confidence bred insolence, and a smart weakness for insulting persiflage, that were among the most exasperating features of a life in Dodge while the Ground Owl lasted.

It is a revenge that cowards often take. Make them safe, and you are apt to make them unbearable. They will offer outrage when they know there can be no reprisal. Thus they humour themselves with the impression of a personal courage on their coward parts, and prevent self-contempt from overwhelming them.

The Ground Owl owned another name—a rightful name. It was Bennington Du Pont, and he capitalized the "Pont." The name was thrown away on Dodge, for Cimarron Bill rechristened him the Ground Owl.

"What may I call you?" Cimarron had demanded. Then, as though explaining a rudeness: "The reason I inquire is that, if you-all continues to grow on me, I might want to ask you to take a seegyar."

"Bennington Du Pont," faltered the Ground Owl. "My name is Bennington Du Pont."

"Which you'll pardon me," returned Cimarron Bill, severely, "if yereafter I prefers to alloode to you as the Ground Owl."

"The Ground Owl!" exclaimed the renamed one, his horror giving him a desperate courage. "Why the Ground Owl?"

“Why the Ground Owl?” repeated Cimarron. Then solemnly: “Because the rattlesnakes don’t kill ’em, an’ no one knows wherefore.”

Thus it befell that within twenty-four hours after his advent every ear in Dodge had heard of the Ground Owl, and not one of Bennington Du Pont.

The Ground Owl’s address was the Wright House. It was at this hostelry he received his earliest glimpse of Mr. Allison, and organised those insult-born differences.

Mr. Allison’s country was Las Animas and the region round about. He had been over in the Panhandle, and was spurring homeward by way of Dodge. Having put his weary pony in the corral, he sought his own refreshment at the Wright House.

Mr. Allison was celebrated for force of character, and the democratic frankness of his six-shooters. His entrance into Las Animas’ social circles had been managed with effect. That was seven years before, and Mr. Hixenbaugh told this of Mr. Allison’s debut.

“Which I was in the Sound Asleep Saloon,” explained Mr. Hixenbaugh, “tryin’ to fill a club flush, when the music of firearms floats over from across the street. I goes to the door on the lope, bein’ curious as to who’s hit, an thar on t’other side I observes a sport who’s sufferin’ from one of them deeformities called a clubfoot, and

who's got a gun in each hand. He's jest caught Bill Gatling in the knee, an' is bein' harassed at with six-shooters by Gene Watkins an' Len Woodruff, who's whangin' away at him from Crosby's door. I lands on the sidewalk in time to see him hive Gene with a bullet in the calf of his laig. Then Gene an' Bill an' Len, the first two bein' redooced to crawl on hands an' knees by virchoo of them bullets, takes refooge in Crosby's, an' surveys this club-foot party a heap respectful from a winder. As I crosses over to extend congratyoolations, he w'irls on me.

"'Be you too a hostile?' he asks, domineerin' at me with his guns.

"'Hostile nothin'!' I replies; 'I'm simply comin' over in a sperit of admiration. What's the trouble?'

"'Stranger,' he says, 'that question is beyond me. I've only been in your town four minutes, an' yet thar seems to be a kind o' prejewdyce ag'inst me in the minds of the ignorant few. But never mind,' he concloods; 'we're all cap'ble of mistakes. My name's Clay Allison, an' these folks'll know me better by an' by. When they do know me, an' have arrived at a complete onderstandin' of my pecooliarities, they'll walk 'round me like I was a swamp.'"

Following this introduction, it would appear that Mr. Allison was taken into fellowship by Las Animas. The

crippled foot and the consequent limp were lost sight of when he was in the saddle. When he was afoot they went verbally unnoticed, since it was his habit to use a Winchester for a crutch.

After eight weeks in Las Animas, Mr. Allison felt as much at home as though he had founded the town. Also, he became nervously sensitive over the public well-being, and, mounted on a milk-white pony, which he called his "wah hoss," rode into open court, and urged that convention of justice, then sitting, to adjourn. Mr. Allison made the point that a too persistent holding of court militated against a popular repose. Inasmuch as he accompanied his opinions with the crutch-Winchester aforesaid, their soundness was conceded by the presiding judge. The judge, as he ordered an adjournment, said that in the face of what practical arguments were presented by Mr. Allison he was driven to regard the whole theory of courts as at best but academic.

Later, by two months, Mr. Allison was driven to slay the Las Animas marshal. In this adventure he again demonstrated the accurate workings of his mind. The marshal, just before he drifted into the infinite, had emptied the right barrel of a Greener 10-gauge into Mr. Allison's brother, John. A shotgun has two barrels, and the jury convoked in the premises, basing decision on that second barrel and arguing from all the circum-

stances that the late officer was gunning for the entire Allison family, gave a verdict of self-defence.

Mr. Allison was honourably acquitted, and the acquittal much encouraged his belief in justice. It showed him too the tolerant spirit of Las Animas, and he displayed his appreciation thereof by engaging in that rugged Western pastime known as "Standing the Town on Its Head." Indeed, Mr. Allison made the bodily reversal of Las Animas a sacred duty to be performed twice a year; but since he invariably pitched upon Christmas and the Fourth of July for these pageantries, the public, so far from finding invidious fault, was inclined to join with him. In short, so much were Mr. Allison and Las Animas one in soul and sentiment, that the moment they had conquered the complete acquaintance of each other they—to employ a metaphor of the farms—"fell together like a shock of oats." Mr. Allison was proud of Las Animas, while Las Animas looked upon Mr. Allison as the chief jewel in its crown.

On the breath of admiration some waif-word of the hardy deeds of Mr. Allison would now and again be wafted down the river to Dodge. Envious ones, who hated Dodge and resented its high repute as "a camp that was never treed," had been even heard to prophesy that Mr. Allison would one day devote a leisure hour to subjecting Dodge to those processes of inversion which

Las Animas had enjoyed, and leave its hitherto unconquered heels where its head should be. These insolent anticipations would wring the heart of Cimarron Bill.

"You can hock your spurs an' pony," he was wont to respond, "that if Clay ever shakes up Dodge, he'll shake it in the smoke."

Mr. Masterson, when the threats of an Allison invasion were brought to his notice, would say nothing. He held it unbecoming his official character to resent a hypothesis, and base declarations of war on an assumption of what might be.

"It's bad policy," quoth Mr. Masterson, "to ford a river before you reach it. It'll be time to settle what Dodge'll do with Clay, when Clay begins to do things to Dodge. He'll have to open a game, however, that no one's ever heard of, if Dodge don't get better than an even break."

"Shore!" coincided Cimarron Bill, confidently. "The idee, because Clay can bluff 'round among them Las Animas tarrapins without gettin' called, that he can go dictatin' terms to Dodge, is eediotic. He'd be too dead to skin in about a minute! That's straight; he wouldn't last as long as a drink of whiskey!"

The Ground Owl was alone in the breakfast room of the Wright House when Mr. Allison limped in. All men

have their delicate side, and it was Mr. Allison's to regard the open wearing of one's iron-mongery as bad form. Wherefore, he was accustomed to hide the Colt's pistols wherewith his hips were decked, beneath the tails of a clerical black coat. Inasmuch as he had left the crutch-Winchester with his sombrero at the hat-rack, even an alarmist like the Ground Owl could discover nothing appalling in his exterior. The halting gait and the black coat made for a harmless impression that went far to unlock the derision of the Ground Owl. He treated himself to an evil grin as Mr. Allison limped to a seat opposite; but since Mr. Allison didn't catch the malicious gleam of it, the grin got by unchallenged.

It was a breakfast custom of the Wright House to provide doughnuts as a fashion of a side-dish whereat a boarder might nibble while awaiting the baking-powder biscuit, "salt hoss," canned tomatoes, tinned potatoes, coffee and condensed milk that made up the lawful breakfast of the caravansary. Las Animas being devoid of doughnuts, Mr. Allison had never met one. Moved by the doughnut example of the Ground Owl, he tasted that delicacy. The doughnut as an edible proved kindly to the palate of Mr. Allison, and upon experiment he desired more. The dish had been drawn over to the elbow of the Ground Owl, and was out of his reach. Perceiving this, Mr. Allison pointed with appealing finger.

"Pard," said Mr. Allison, politely, "please pass them fried holes."

"Fried holes!" cried the Ground Owl, going off into derisive laughter. "Fried holes! Say! you limp in your talk like you do in your walk! Fried holes!" and the Ground Owl again burst into uninstructed mirth.

The Ground Owl's glee was frost-bitten in the bud. The frost that nipped it was induced by a Colt's pistol in the hand of Mr. Allison, the chilling muzzle not a foot from his scared face. The Ground Owl's veins ran ice; he choked and fell back in his helpless chair. Not less formidable than the Colt's pistol was the fury-twisted visage of Mr. Allison.

Even in his terror the Ground Owl recalled the word of Mr. Masterson.

"Don't shoot," he squeaked. "I'm unarmed!"

For one hideous moment Mr. Allison hesitated; it was in his mind to violate a precedent, and slaughter the gunless Ground Owl where he sat. But his instincts and his education made against it; he jammed his weapon back into its scabbard with the terse command:

"Go heel yourse'f, you bull-snake! Dodge'll have you or me to plant!"

The Ground Owl groped his frightened way to the door. A moment later he was burrowing deep beneath a stack of alfalfa hay in Mr. Trask's corral, and it

would have been necessary to set fire to the hay to find him. Mr. Allison sat glaring, awaiting the Ground Owl's return—which he never doubted. He no longer wanted breakfast, he wanted blood.

Dodge knew nothing of these ferocious doings—the insult, the flight of the Ground Owl, and the vicious waiting of Mr. Allison. The first news of it that reached Dodge was when Mr. Allison—rifle in its saddle-scabbard, six-shooters at his belt—came whooping and spurring, the sublimation of warlike defiance, into the town's main thoroughfare. He had saddled that bronco within twenty feet of the Ground Owl, shivering beneath the hay. The explosive monologue with which he had accompanied the saddling, and wherein he promised a host of bloody experiences to the Ground Owl, rendered that recreant as cold as a key and as limp as a rag.

After a mad dash up and down the street, enlivened by divers war shouts, Mr. Allison pulled up in front of Mr. Webster's Alamo Saloon. Sitting in the saddle, he fiercely demanded the Ground Owl at the hands of the public, and threatened Dodge with extinction in case he was denied.

Affairs stood thus when Jack turned Mr. Masterson out of his blankets. The soul of Jack was in arms. It would have broken his boy's heart had Mr. Allison

flung forth his challenge in the open causeways of Dodge and departed, unaccommodated, unrebuked, to cheer Las Animas with a recount of his prowess.

"That's business!" exulted Jack, as the double "cluck!" of Mr. Masterson's buffalo gun broke charmingly upon his ear. "Send daylight plumb through him! Don't let him go back to Las Animas with a yarn about how Dodge laid down to him!"

It was the first impression of Mr. Masterson that Mr. Allison's purpose was to merely feed his self-love by a general defiance of Dodge. He would ride and shout and shoot and disport himself unlawfully. In this he would demonstrate the prostrate sort of the Dodgeian nerve.

Mr. Masterson was clear that this contumely must be checked. It would never do to let word drift into Texas that Dodge had wilted. Were that to occur, when the boys with the Autumn herds came in, never a mirror in town would survive; the very air would sing and buzz with contemptuous bullets. Mr. Masterson, from his window, came carefully down on Mr. Allison with the buffalo gun; he would reprove that fatuous egotist, whose conceit it was to fancy that he could stand up Dodge.

Mr. Masterson would have instantly shot Mr. Allison from the saddle, but was withstood by a detail. Mr. Allison's six-shooters were still in his belt; his Win-

chester was still in its scabbard beneath his leg. These innocuous conditions constrained Mr. Masterson to pause; he must, according to the rule in such case made and provided, wait until a weapon was in the overt hand of Mr. Allison.

Mr. Masterson could make neither head nor tail of what Mr. Allison was saying. For the most it was curse, and threat, coupled with pictures of what terrific punishments—to cure it of its pride—Mr. Allison would presently inflict upon Dodge. This being all, however, Mr. Masterson could do no more than wait—being at pains, meanwhile, to see the oratorical Mr. Allison through both sights of the buffalo gun. When Mr. Allison snatched a pistol from his belt, that would be Mr. Masterson's cue; he would then drill him for the good of Dodge and the instruction of Las Animas.

Having the business wholly in hand, it was next the thought of Mr. Masterson to obviate interference. He turned to Jack:

“Skip out, and tell Kell and Short and Cimarron not to run in on Clay. Tell 'em I've got him covered and to keep away. If they closed in on him, they might blank my fire.”

When Jack was gone, Mr. Masterson again settled to his aim, picking out a spot under the right shoulder of Mr. Allison wherein to plant the bullet.

“It’s where I’d plug a buffalo bull,” ruminated Mr. Masterson, “and it ought to do for Clay.”

Mr. Allison maintained his verbal flow unchecked. He had elocutionary gifts, had Mr. Allison, and flaunted them. Mingling scorn with reproach, and casting defiance over all, he spake in unmeasured terms of Dodge and its inhabitants. But never once did he lay hand to gun; it was solely an exhibition of rhetoric.

Mr. Masterson waxed weary. There were spaces when the mills of Mr. Allison’s vituperation ran low; at such intervals Mr. Masterson would take the buffalo gun from his shoulder. Anon, Mr. Allison’s choler would mount, his threats and maledictions against all things Dodgeian would soar. Thereupon, hope would relight its taper in the eye of Mr. Masterson; he would again cover Mr. Allison with his buffalo gun. Mr. Allison’s energy would again dwindle, and the light of hope again sink low in the Masterson eye. The buffalo gun would be given another recess. First and last, by the later word of Mr. Masterson, Mr. Allison was covered and uncovered twenty times. It was exceedingly fatiguing to Mr. Masterson, who was losing respect for Mr. Allison, as one all talk and no shoot.

While Mr. Allison vituperated, his glance roved up and down the street.

“What’s the matter with him!” considered Mr. Mas-

terson disgustedly. "Why doesn't he throw himself loose!"

Mr. Masterson's disgust became amazement when Mr. Allison turned in his saddle, and asked in tones wherein was more of complaint than challenge:

"Where's Bat Masterson? He's on the squar'! He won't let no cheap store clerk put it all over me, an' get away! Where's Bat?"

As though seeking reply, Mr. Allison in a most pacific manner got down from the saddle, and limped away out of range into Mr. Webster's Alamo.

Mr. Masterson pitched the buffalo gun into a corner, put on his more personal artillery, and repaired to the Alamo with the thought of investigating the phenomenon. In the Alamo he found Mr. Allison asking Mr. Webster—who looked a bit pale—to send for Mr. Masterson.

"Have somebody round Bat up," said Mr. Allison, peevishly. "Which I want a talk with him about my injuries."

"What's wrong, Clay?" asked Mr. Masterson—outwardly careless, inwardly as alert as a bobcat. "What's gone wrong?"

"Is that you, Bat?" demanded Mr. Allison, facing around on his lame foot. "Wherever have you been for the last half hour? I've hunted you all over camp."

“Where have I been for a half hour? I’ve been seesawing on you with a Sharp’s for the better part of it.”

“Is that so!” exclaimed Mr. Allison, while his face lighted up with a kind of pleased conviction. “Thar, d’ye see now! While I was in that saddle I could feel I was covered every moment. It was the sperits tellin’ me! They kept warnin’ me that if I batted an eye or wagged a year I was a goner. It was shore one of them prov’dential hunches which is told of by gospel sharps in pra’r-meetin’s.”

Mr. Masterson’s indignation was extreme when he had heard the story of Mr. Allison’s ill usage. And at that, his anger rested upon the wrongs of Dodge rather than upon those of Mr. Allison.

“One may now see,” said Mr. Masterson, “the hole into which good people can be put by a cowardly outcast of the Ground Owl type. That disgusting Ground Owl might have been the means of killing a dozen men. Here he turns in an’ stirs Clay up; and then, when he’s got him keyed to concert pitch, he sneaks away and hides, and leaves us with Clay on our hands!”

Cimarron Bill came into the Alamo; his brow turned dark with the scandal of those friendly relations between Mr. Masterson and Mr. Allison, which he saw and did not understand. Drawing aside, he stood moodily at the

end of the bar, keeping a midnight eye the while on Mr. Allison, thirsting for an outbreak.

Mr. Masterson approached him craftily—being diplomatic and having a mind to preserve the peace.

“There’s something I want you to do, Cimarron,” said Mr. Masterson, easily. The other brightened. “No, not that!” continued Mr. Masterson, intercepting a savage look which Cimarron bestowed upon Mr. Allison, “not Clay.”

“Who then?” demanded Cimarron, greatly disappointed.

“The other one,” responded Mr. Masterson. “Still I don’t want you to overplay. You must use judgment, and while careful not to do too little, be equally careful not to do too much. This is the proposition: You are to go romancing ’round until you locate that miscreant Ground Owl. Once located, you are to softly, yet sufficiently, bend a gun over his head.”

“Leave the Ground Owl to me,” said Cimarron Bill, his buoyant nature beginning to collect itself. As he went forth upon his mission, he tossed this assurance over his shoulder: “You gents’ll hear a dog howl *poco tempo*, an’ when you do you can gamble me an’ that Ground Owl clerk has crossed up with one another.”

“That,” observed Mr. Short, who arrived in time to hear the commission given Cimarron Bill, “that’s what

I call gettin' action both ways from the jack. You split out Cimarron from Clay here; an' at the same time arrange to stampede that malignant Ground Owl out o' camp. Which I always allowed you had a head for business, Bat."

Cimarron Bill was wrong. He did not cut the trail of the vermin Ground Owl—lying close beneath the alfalfa of Mr. Trask! Neither did any dog howl that day. But Dodge was victorious without. It was rid of the offensive Ground Owl; when the sun went down that craven one crept forth, and fled by cloak of night.

"Which it goes to show," explained Cimarron Bill, judgmentally, when a week later he was recovered from the gloom into which Mr. Allison's escape had plunged him, "which it goes to show that every cloud has a silver lining. Clay saves himse'f; but that Ground Owl has to go. It's a stand-off. We lose on Clay; but we shore win on that Ground Owl man."

CHAPTER XI.

HOW TRUE LOVE RAN IN DODGE.

IN the old golden days, gunshot wounds were never over-soberly regarded by Dodge. Mr. Kelly, being creased by Rattlesnake Sanders and discovering that the bullet had done no more than just bore its sullen way through the muscular portion of his shoulder, came to look upon the incident as trivial, and nothing beyond a technical violation of his rights. He gave his word to that effect; and when Rattlesnake—in seclusion on Bear Creek—was made aware of that word, he returned to the ranges along the White Woman, and re-began a cowboy existence where his flight had broken it off. Mr. Kelly's forbearance was approved by the public, the more readily since Dodge in the catholicity of its justice believed in punishing folk, not for what they did but for what they were, and Rattlesnake was an estimable youth.

This tolerant breadth was wholly of the olden day,

and has not come down to modern men. Dodge now lies writhing beneath the wheel of Eastern convention. Starched shirts have crept in, derby hats have done their worst, and that frank fraternalism, so brightly a virtue of the heretofore, has disappeared. To-day the sound of a six-shooter in the timid streets of Dodge would produce a shock, and whatever gentleman was behind that alarming artillery meet the fate which would encounter him under similar explosive conditions in Philadelphia.

California is the proprietor of a past, and in moments of sentiment croons of:

The days of old,
The days of gold,
The days of Forty-nine.

Dodge also owns a day-that-was. Its memory appeals often and fondly to an hour when no one asked a stranger's name, but politely reduced curiosity to a cautious "What may I call you?" The stranger might have been "Bill Jones" in the faraway, forgotten East. He could now become "Jack Robinson"; and if his case presented any personal argument favourable to such change, the liberality of Dodge not alone permitted but invited that amendment. The stranger's life for Dodge commenced with his advent in its friendly midst and went

no further back. His past, with all that to him appertained, had fallen from him as fall the fetters from the bond slave when once he sets foot upon the sacred soil of England. Dodge refused to be involved in any question of what that stranger had done, or who he was. It received him, trusted him, watched him, and when popular judgment concerning him had ripened, it either applauded or lynched him as circumstances seemed most to invite.

It is good to shut one's eyes and ruminate upon a past. The old days are ever golden, and for those of Dodge this should be their portrait. What might the heart of the stranger desire that they do not offer him? If he be a-weary, there is the Wright House whereat he may repose himself. Does he crave relaxation, there is Mr. Peacock's Dance Hall, called sometimes the Bird Cage, where to the lively observations of the fiddle he shall loosen the boards of the floor until refreshed. At all hours of the night the master of ceremonies is to be heard above the subdued muttering of exuberant feet:

"Ally man left—all sasshay! Balance to yer podners—all hands 'round! Grand right an' left—dozy do! Chaat 'n' swing—right arm to yer podner! All prom'nade to the bar!"

If mere trade be the stranger's purpose, where is that emporium superior to Mr. Wright's? Should the appe-

tite of speculation seize him, is there not the Alamo, the Alhambra and the Long Branch? From those latter clapboard palaces of chance, where Fortune holds unflinching court, comes the inviting soft flutter of chips, punctuated by such terse announcements from roulette wheel and faro table as "All's set an' th' ball's rollin'!" or "Ace lose, troy win!" Now and again a hush descends while through the blue tobacco smoke two sisters of charity—looking with their white faces and black hoods like pale pictures set in jet—make the silent round of the games, seeking aid for their hospital in Santa Fé. Each courtier of Fortune cashes a handful of chips, and passes the proceeds to them over his shoulder; knowing that should sickness lay skeleton hand upon him he will be welcome at their merciful gates.

If the stranger be not only strange but tender—having just made his appearance, possibly, on some belated "buckboard" from the South, where he has been touring the Panhandle or ransacking the ranges with thoughts of buying a ranch—the all-night whirl of Dodge excites his wonder. In such round-eyed case, he sets forth at four o'clock in the morning his amazement to Mr. Short.

"Aren't you open rather late?" mildly observes the tender stranger.

"It is rather late," responds Mr. Short, with an eye

of tolerant cynicism, "it is rather late for night before last, but it's jest th' shank of th' evenin' for to-night."

The tender stranger makes no response, for his faculties have become engaged upon an ebullient cowboy who, with unsteady step, swings in through the Long Branch's open door, spurs a-jingle, wide hat set at an arrogant slant.

"I'm Palo Duro Pete," the invader remarks. "Which blood's my colour, gents, an' I kin whip my weight in wolves!"

The strain on the tender stranger's nerves is redeemed by Mr. Short, who languidly fells Palo Duro Pete with his six-shooter. The strain gains additional relief when Palo Duro picks himself up with a gratified air, and says:

"Gents, this is shorely the sociablest crowd I've crossed up with as yet. Let's libate!"

In a daze of admiration the tender stranger "libates" with Palo Duro, while Mr. Short makes a careless third. Mr. Short suggests cigars at the expense of the Long Branch, and Palo Duro, after lighting one, goes jingling out into the night to continue his happy exploits at the Alamo or the Alhambra.

Those old days are golden days! True, a centipede now and then makes a promenade of one's slumbering countenance; or a stinging lizard employs his sting upon

one with all of the burning first effects that attend being shot with a Colt's-45; or some sleepy rattlesnake insinuates himself into one's unbidden blankets, having a plan to bunk in with one and a settled resolve to give battle if refused an honest half of the bed. But these adventures overtake one only in hottest summer weather, and this seasonal fact so narrows interest that Dodge seldom wears them on its mind.

In those old golden days Dodge is a democracy. Caste does not occur; no hill, no hollow of human inequality ruffles the bland surface of the body politic. There is but one aristocracy and that is the aristocracy of courage, but one title of nobility and that the name of "a square man."

And Dodge can exercise forbearance. Your cowboy, uplifted of Old Jordan, may ride his pony through the streets and spur it to the pace of meteors. But he must not ride it upon the sidewalks, for that would mean insult to the dignity and defiance of the power of Dodge. He may freely empty his midnight pistol, so that he empty it at the moon. But he must not enflade the causeways or turn its muzzle upon any house of entertainment, however much the latter has offended. In brief, he may wax either vigorous or vociferous to what pitch best suits his fancy, saving this that his vigours and vociferations must not be transacted at the public's expense.

Dodge, too, takes cognisance of an impulse and construes a motive. When Palo Duro Pete, from his seat in the Dodge Opera House, arises in a torrent of tears, pulls his six-shooter and slams away at Miss Witherspoon, while that cantatrice is singing "Home, Sweet Home," Dodge wholly understands the sobbing, shooting Palo Duro. Had he ridden away on another's pony, or sought to shift the title to a mule by heating a running iron and changing its brand, Dodge would not have attributed the act to any excess of emotion. It would have recognised a crime, and dealt coldly with Palo Duro as with a criminal taken in the felon fact. On the Opera House occasion, however, it is plain that Palo Duro has opened upon Miss Witherspoon in an ecstasy of admiration. The shot is in its way a compliment, and meant for the exaltation of that celebrated soprano. The weeping Palo Duro is moved, not of murderous impulse, but a spirit of adoration that can only explain itself with a gun. Dodge knows this. Dodge feels it, admits it; and since Palo Duro works no harm with his testimonial, Dodge believes it has fully corrected him when it drags him from the theatre, and "buffaloes" him into a more week-a-day and less gala frame of mind.

While Dodge is capable of toleration, it can also draw the line. When Mr. Webster accepts a customer's

wooden leg as security for drinks, and sets the pledge behind the Alamo bar, it does much to endanger his standing. Mr. Webster averts a scandal only by returning the wooden leg; and at that Cimarron Bill has already given his opinion.

“Any gent,” observes Cimarron Bill, “who’ll let a party hock personal fragments of himse’f that a-way for licker, is onfit to drink with a nigger or eat with a dog,” and Dodge in the silence with which it receives this announcement, is held by many as echoing the sentiment expressed.

Those old days be golden days, and the good citizenry of Dodge are at their generous best. And this is the rule of conduct: Should you go broke, everybody comes to your rescue; should you marry, everybody rejoices at the wedding; should a child be born unto you to call you “father,” everybody drinks with you; should you fall ill, everybody sits up with you; should you die, everybody comes to the funeral—that is, everybody who is out of jail.

Rattlesnake Sanders, forgiven by Mr. Kelly and restored to his rightful art of cows as theretofore practiced by him along the White Woman, had frequent flour, bacon, and saleratus reason to visit Dodge. Being in Dodge, he dined, supped and breakfasted at the Wright House, and it was at that place of regale he

met Miss Barndollar. The young lady was a waitress, and her intimates called her "Calamity Carry" for the crockery that she broke. Her comings in and going out were marked of many a crash, as a consignment of dishes went grandly to the floor. But help was sparse and hard to get, and the Wright House management overlooked these mishaps, hoping that Miss Barndollar, when she had enlarged her experience, would be capable of better things.

On the day that Rattlesnake Sanders first beheld Miss Barndollar, he came into the dining-room of the Wright House seeking recuperation from the fatigues of a 60-mile ride. When he had drawn his chair to the table, and disposed of his feet so that the spurs which graced his heels did not mutually interfere, Miss Barndollar came and stood at his shoulder.

"Roast beef, b'iled buffalo tongue, plover potpie, fried antelope steak, an' baked salt hoss an' beans," observed Miss Barndollar in a dreamy sing-song. The Wright House did not print its menu, and the bill of fare was rehearsed by the waitresses to the wayfarer within its walls.

At the sound of Miss Barndollar's voice, Rattlesnake Sanders looked up. He made no other response, but seemed to drift away in visions born of a contemplation of the graces of Miss Barndollar.

This last was the more odd since Miss Barndollar, in looks, was astray from any picture of loveliness. Perhaps Cimarron Bill when later he discussed with Mr. Short the loves of Miss Barndollar and Rattlesnake Sanders, fairly set forth the state of affairs.

“Which of course,” remarked Cimarron Bill, gallantly cautious, “thar was never the lady born I’d call ugly; but speakin’ of this Calamity Carry, I’m driven to remark that she has a disadvantageous face.”

With Rattlesnake Sanders it was the old, old story of love at first sight. His ideals were not those of the critical Cimarron Bill, and he beheld with different eyes. In those high cheekbones, irregular nose, wide mouth, and freckled face he discovered charms. Miss Barndollar to the besotted Rattlesnake was a lamp of beauty. The smitten one forgot his hunger, forgot the list of edibles that Miss Barndollar had told off, and sat tongue-tied.

Life is replete of such dulcet mysteries—the mystery of Miss Barndollar’s ugliness and Rattlesnake Sander’s instant love. It was such to inspire the late farmer philosopher and almanac maker when he musingly related the paradox:

“They do say Love is blind, but I’m dinged if some fellers can’t see more in their gals than I can.”

Miss Barndollar, waiting to be instructed as to the

appetite of Rattlesnake Sanders, grew impatient with his rapt staring. She repeated her announcement:

“Roast beef, b’iled buffalo tongue, plover potpie, fried antelope steak, an’ baked salt hoss an’ beans!”

Sixty seconds later, the fatuous Rattlesnake still silently staring, Miss Barndollar broke a bread-plate on his head and went her way.

It was like clenching the driven nail—that bread-plate episode. The jolt to his faculties crystallised the love in Rattlesnake which before had been in solution, and he became Miss Barndollar’s slave.

And yet it is no more than justice to the lady to explain that her bread-plate descent upon the spellbound Rattlesnake was the fruit of a misunderstanding. Being unaware of what soft sentiments she had inspired, Miss Barndollar conceived his glances to have been bestowed upon her in mockery. This was shown when she passed the cashier as she swept from the room.

“What was the trouble, Calamity?” asked the cashier, who had witnessed Miss Barndollar’s reproof, without knowing its cause. “What did that jayhawker do?”

“Which he stared at me,” replied the outraged Miss Barndollar. “I’ll teach sech horned toads that if my face is freckled, I’m a lady all the same.”

When and where and how the headlong Rattlesnake found time and place to woo Miss Barndollar went unex-

plained to Dodge. Its earliest news was when the whisper leaped from lip to lip that Miss Barndollar and Rattlesnake were to wed.

“Is that so, Rattlesnake?” asked Mr. Short, referring to the event as promised by gossip. “Is it straight? You’ll excuse me, Rattlesnake, if I adds that I hopes an’ trusts it is. Dodge wouldn’t stand no triflin’ with the ontried heart of Calamity, an’ if you-all is simply flirtin’ with the affections of that pore girl I wouldn’t fill your moccasins for a small clay farm.”

“Flirtin’,” retorted the scandalised Rattlesnake. “Luke, you insults me! Calamity an’ me is goin’ to hook up followin’ the spring round-up.”

After making this declaration, Rattlesnake, in a kind of ecstatic hysteria at the glowing future before him, withdrew to a corner of the Long Branch and lapsed into a dance which had its rise with the Cheyennes, and was known among its copper coloured authors as the Love Dance of the Catamounts.

While Rattlesnake Sanders was thus relieving his soul, Cimarron Bill, who was present, regarded his mad doings with a dubious brow.

“That Rattlesnake person’s locoed!” said Cimarron, turning sadly to Mr. Short. “I can’t read signal smokes an’ don’t know the meanin’ of signs if that mave-
rick don’t wind up in a crazy house, cuttin’ paper dolls.”

"He ain't locoed," explained Mr. Short, with a confidence born of experiences that went beyond those of Cimarron Bill. "That Rattlesnake boy 's in love. They allers ghost-dance an' go pirootin' 'round eediotic that a-way."

Cimarron Bill was not convinced, and took later opportunity to say as much to Mr. Masterson. He urged that the nuptials threatened by Miss Barndollar and Rattlesnake Sanders be suppressed. Cimarron insisted that as Sheriff of Ford it was Mr. Masterson's business to interfere.

"Which the way I regyards these proceedin's," explained Cimarron, "they're a menace to the peace of Dodge. Them two people'll fight worse'n McBride an' Bridget did. You ought to stop 'em, Bat."

"How'd you stop 'em?" returned Mr. Masterson. "You can stop folks shooting one another, but you can no more stop 'em marryin' one another than you can stop a cyclone."

"Just the same," said Cimarron, stubbornly, "it's your dooty to try."

This conversation took place in the door of Mr. Kelly's Alhambra. While Mr. Masterson and the gloomy Cimarron were talking, Miss Barndollar and Rattlesnake Sanders came down the street. As the pair arrived opposite Mr. Masterson and Cimarron, the infatuated

Rattlesnake jocosely placed his arm about Miss Barndollar's waist. Whereupon that virgin coyly bestowed upon Rattlesnake a resounding blow.

"I'll teach ye!" cried Miss Barndollar, meanwhile giving Rattlesnake an arch look, "I'll teach ye whose waist you're tamperin' with! I'll nacherally swat ye ev'ry time y' do it."

"Ain't she got sperit!" exclaimed Rattlesnake, winking a blissful eye at Mr. Masterson. "Thar's nothin' Texas about her! She's due to grade as cornfed, my Calamity is, or I'm a shorthorn!"

The happy pair continued onward to Mr. Wright's store and set about pricing pots and kettles and what other bric-à-brac may become the basis of a primitive housekeeping.

"Thar!" said Cimarron Bill, decisively. "You can now tell how that eediot Rattlesnake ain't cap'ble of se'f-protection. It's not only ag'in your oaths of office, but it's inhuman not to interfere. Before them two has been married a week, that Calamity girl'll t'ar into pore Rattlesnake with her ten nails an' make saddlestrings of him."

"That's your view, Cimarron," retorted Mr. Masterson. "Now to my mind Rattlesnake and Calamity'll get along as peaceful as two pups in a basket. Besides, speaking of public interest, do you know how

many inhabitants Dodge has lost during the official year?"

"No," said Cimarron Bill, "I don't. But whatever has that got to do with Calamity ropin' up this yere innocent Rattlesnake?"

"There were seven to get bumped off," continued Mr. Masterson, disregarding the question, "exclusive of McBride's Bridget. Seven; and I don't count Mexicans and non-resident cowboys who came in with the herds and expired in the natural course of festivals which they, themselves, inaugurated. Seven! That's knocking a hole in Dodge's census."

"But why," protested the honest Cimarron, "should you-all punish Rattlesnake for that? He don't down any of them seven. He's pulled his gun jest once this year, an' then he only busts the crust on Kell, an' no harm done."

"No harm!" interjected Mr. Masterson, severely.

"Whatever was the harm?" retorted the obstinate Cimarron. "Kell's inside thar runnin' his joint, ain't he? Besides the fault was Kell's. Rattlesnake rings in a cold hand on Kell, as a gent every now an' then will, an' Kell taunts him about it. If Kell's goin' to comment on a cold hand he'd ought to do it with his six-shooter. To go tantalisin' Rattlesnake about it with his mouth that a-way, makes what I calls a case of crim'nal carelessness,

an' leaves Kell responsible. But whether it does or not, why rooin Rattlesnake's life with this Calamity lady because of them other seven? Thar's neither jestic nor reason in it."

"Cimarron," replied Mr. Masterson, disgustedly, "you're forever roping at the wrong steer. There's no ruin in the business. This is the idea: We lose seven. Now when Rattlesnake and Calamity are married, they may do something to repair our loss. If they were to jump in and have seven children, that would make it an even break, wouldn't it?"

"Still," contended Cimarron Bill, "I don't see why the losses of Dodge should be saddled onto Rattlesnake. It ain't right to heap burdens on him that, properly regarded, belongs to the commoonity."

"Well," observed Mr. Masterson, turning on his heel for a stroll down the street, "I won't dispute all day with you. Rattlesnake's of full age, free, and half white, and if he wants to wed Calamity it's his American privilege."

"Which you could say the same," returned Cimarron Bill, "if Rattlesnake was aimin' at soicide."

It is to be supposed that Miss Barndollar and Rattlesnake Sanders would have drifted quietly and uneventfully to the altar had it not been for the intervention of an accident. Rattlesnake was aiding Mr. Trask in cut-

ting out a particular mule from the bunch in his corals. His pony, slipping with its unshod hoofs, fell and in falling broke Rattlesnake's left leg—both bones—below the knee.

There was no resident surgeon in Dodge. There had been; but an Eastern past having found him out, he vanished between sun and sun. In the emergency presented by Rattlesnake's fractured leg a surgeon was summoned from Cimarron.

The Cimarron practitioner was a young, sappy, callow, pinefeather form of scientist, excessively in the springtime of his career, and no one to excite confidence. Rattlesnake Sanders debated him with distrustful eye, but, since nothing better presented, was fain to surrender to him his broken leg. The sappy one set the leg and withdrew, programming a call for the next day.

Everything, according to Cimarron Bill who came upon the scene an hour after the sappy one departed, was wrong about that leg-setting. The bandage was an error, the splints were a crime. Their plain effect was to torture the stricken Rattlesnake. The views of Rattlesnake fell in with those of Cimarron Bill. Between groans and maledictions, heaped upon the sappy one, he wholly agreed with him.

The pair were alone at the moment, and acting in con-

cert they removed the offending bandages and splints. Giving the patient a bottle of arnica wherewith to temporarily console his aches, Cimarron, with a fine conceit of his powers that commonly would have challenged admiration, walked over to the carpenter shop in Mr. Trask's corral, and fashioned new splints after original designs of his own. Then, with the help of Rattlesnake, he re-set the leg and restored the bandages as seemed to him best and mete. Following these deeds the worthy Cimarron and his patient took a drink, looked upon their work, and pronounced it good.

Those feats in medicine and surgery were performed in an upper chamber of the Wright House which on the spur of the moment had been set aside as a hospital in the interests of Rattlesnake Sanders. The first to learn of them, beyond the two therein engaged, was Miss Barn-dollar. She had been with her beloved Rattlesnake while the lawful sappy one was busy about his repairs. Coming again into the room following the exploits of Cimarron Bill, her glance of love was sharp to mark the change.

"Whatever's up?" asked the wondering Miss Barn-dollar.

"Nothin's up," replied Rattlesnake. "Only me an' Cimarron, not approv'in' of them malpractices of that jacklaig doctor, has had a new deal. An' that re-

minds me," he continued, turning to Cimarron, who was surveying the bandaged result with a satisfied air; "give me my pistol. I'll keep it in bed with me a whole lot, an' when that igneramus comes chargin' in to-morry mornin' I'll stand him off."

"But you mustn't shoot," warned Cimarron, as he brought the weapon. "When he shows up, tell him to pull his freight. An' if he hesitates, sort o' take to menacin' at him with the gun. But don't shoot none; Bat's gettin' that partic'ler he wouldn't stand it."

The composed manners of both Rattlesnake and Cimarron worked upon the credulity of Miss Barndollar. In the face of so much confidence it was difficult to doubt. Still, she cross-questioned Cimarron when she found him alone on the Wright House porch.

"Be you shore," she asked, "that Rattlesnake's laig 'll come right? Which if it's out o' plumb when he's cured, I'll shorely make you hard to find!"

"Rattlesnake's laig," returned Cimarron, reassuringly, "will eemerge from them splints as straight as Luke Short's deal box, an' said implement of faro-bank has allers been reckoned the straightest thing in town. You need give yoursel'f no oneasiness, Calamity."

"Which I'll take your word," responded Miss Barndollar. "But if that laig ain't all that heart could wish,

I'll keep you plenty oneasy for the balance of your days!"

Mr. Masterson, when given word of the matter, was somewhat troubled by Cimarron's unlooked for debut in the field of surgery. Like Miss Barndollar, Mr. Masterson asked questions.

"Did you ever set anybody's leg before?" he inquired.

"Did I ever set any sport's laigs before!" retorted Cimarron Bill, with a yawn of careless indifference. "I've set twenty cows' laigs, an' what's the difference? 'Thar's nothin' to the play. It's as easy as fittin' together the two ends of a broken stick, with your eyes shet. Of course them doctor sharps raise the long yell about it bein' difficult, aimin' tharby to bluff you out o' your bankroll."

Upon his arrival next day, the sappy one was much confounded to find his patient propped up in bed, smoking a bad cigar. His confusion was increased when the patient drew a Colt's-45 from beneath the blankets, surveying him the while with a loathely scowl. The sappy one thought that Rattlesnake Sanders had added insanity to a broken leg. This theory was strengthened when the forbidding Rattlesnake waved him from the room with his weapon. The sappy one went; he said that he loved his art, but not well enough to attempt its practice within point-blank range of a hostile six-shooter.

When the sappy one found himself again in the street, Jack, who, although the *Weekly Planet* had been dead for months, was still beset of all the instincts of a news-maker, laid bare to him the interference of Cimarron Bill in the affairs of that fractured leg. The sappy one waxed exceedingly bitter, and spoke freely of Cimarron Bill.

"He called you an empiric," said Jack, relating the strictures of the sappy one to Cimarron an hour later.

"A what?"

"An empiric."

"Spell it," and Cimarron drew a deep, resentful breath.

"E-m-p-i-r-i-c."

"Whatever does it mean?"

"It means a four-flush," said Jack, who was liberal in definitions.

"I won't shoot him," observed Cimarron, after a profound pause; "no I won't spring no gun on him, for that might prove disturbin' to the public peace. Which I'll merely burn him at the stake."

The sappy one was miles away from Dodge when these flame and fagot threats were formulated; and as he took pains to remain away thereafter, he gave Cimarron Bill scant chance to execute them. At long range, however, he continued to make his malignant influence felt. He

sent for Miss Barndollar and told her that Rattlesnake's one remaining hope was to have that mismanaged leg re-broken and re-set. Failing these measures, the sappy one gave it as his professional opinion that the leg would look like an interrogation point. As an upcome, Miss Barndollar came back weeping to Dodge.

"But the laig's O. K.," remonstrated Rattlesnake Sanders, when Miss Barndollar unfurled to him the sappy one's predictions. "It's comin' round as solid as a sod house."

"But you'll do it to please me, Rattlesnake," coaxed Miss Barndollar. "I'm a proud girl, an' I don't want to wed no gent with a laig like a corkscrew."

Rattlesnake was shaken by the tender persistency of Miss Barndollar. However, he said that he must see Cimarron Bill.

"What do you think yourse'f, Cimarron?" asked Rattlesnake earnestly, when the worthy Cimarron had been rounded up by Jack for the conference.

"That limb," observed Cimarron, judgmatically, and cocking a wise eye like a crow looking into a jug, "that limb, as framed up, is a credit to us both. It's simply aces before the draw! Don't tech it."

"But Calamity allows she'll throw me down about that weddin'."

Miss Barndollar was not in the room, and Cimarron took on a look of grim cunning.

"Ev'ry cloud has a silver linin'," remarked Cimarron, enigmatically. "Rattlesnake, this yere will turn out the luckiest laig you ever had."

Following these foggy announcements, Cimarron said that it would be a point of honour with him to prevent any intromission with the leg of Rattlesnake Sanders.

"This offensive sawbones," he explained, "publically alluded to me as a empirick. In so doin' he compels me to go through the way I'm headed. I shall consider any attempt to break that laig again as an attack upon my character, an' conduct myse'f accordin' with a gun."

"That sounds on the level," observed Rattlesnake to Miss Barndollar, who had come into the room in time to hear the ultimatum of Cimarron. "For us to go tamperin' with this yere member that a-way, would be equiv'lent to castin' aspersions on Cimarron."

"You never loved me!" murmured Miss Barndollar, beginning to cry.

"Calamity!" exclaimed Rattlesnake, reproachfully. "You're my soul!"

"An' yet," she sobbed, rocking herself in her chair, "you refooses my least request! Is it love to ast me to

go through life as the wife of a party with a game laig?"

"But Calamity!"

"I knows gents who'd break their hearts for me, let alone their laigs!"

Rattlesnake looked appealingly at Cimarron, who was bearing himself with studied dignity.

"Which you'll nacherally thank me a heap for this some day!" said Cimarron, replying to the look.

"Calamity," cooed Rattlesnake, "let me have a word alone with Cimarron."

"You-all can have what words you please," snorted Miss Barndollar, beginning to dry her indignant eyes, "you can have what words you please with this person. But I wants to saw it off on you right yere, Rattlesnake Sanders, that no lady would be jestified in entrustin' her footure to a gent who'd go argufyin' an' h'ar-splittin' about a triflin' matter like this. You'll either get that laig fixed, or our engagement's at an end. Yes, sir," concluded Miss Barndollar in a sudden gust of temper, "it's no longer a laig. Which it's now ceased to be a laig and become a principle," and Miss Barndollar flounced from the room.

"The first day I can ride," groaned Rattlesnake, "I'll shore descend upon that sawbones all spraddled out, an' obtain a spec'men of his h'ar!"

Calming himself, Rattlesnake discoursed sagely and at length with Cimarron, saying that he was in favour of yielding to the demands of Miss Barndollar. The leg could easily be rebroken. Both he and Cimarron would of course understand that it did not require such treatment. They would agree that it was simply a concession to Miss Barndollar, and not to be held as reflecting on Cimarron.

“Because, d’ye see,” said Rattlesnake, “take it every way from the jack, I wouldn’t miss marryin’ Calamity if it meant breakin’ a dozen laigs. I think we’d better let her have her way, Cimarron. You don’t know girls like I do; but the fact is, you allers want to humour ’em in little things so’s to have your own way in big ones. You call her in, Cimarron, an’ tell her she’s plumb right about this fool laig.”

In the teeth of this specious argument, Cimarron still persisted with his objections. He said that the attitude of Miss Barndollar was born of vanity. He pointed out that the much debated leg was as straight as a gun barrel. He re-told the insult put upon himself in the epithet of empiric. Constantly, he hinted that untold good lay behind his present obstinacy, and that Rattlesnake would admit his gratitude therefore in days to come. He closed by suggesting that they send for Mr. Masterson.

With a talent for compromise, and prone to middle paths, Mr. Masterson believed that, inasmuch as a fortnight had already elapsed, Miss Barndollar ought not to object to the leg continuing as it then was. Rattlesnake Sanders would give his promise to have the leg instantly refractured in event of any final queerness.

Upon this proposal being carried to Miss Barndollar by Jack, who was delegated to the trust by Rattlesnake and Mr. Masterson, she called that youth a "cub prairie dog" and demanded his authority for meddling with two throbbing hearts. Jack, deeply chagrined, pled the commission of Rattlesnake and Mr. Masterson. Miss Barndollar wept, and Jack, being mercurial and a child of active sympathies, wept with her. In the end Miss Barndollar dried her eyes, kissed Jack and bid him return to the callous Rattlesnake and say that she had cast him out of her heart forever.

"Tell him," said Miss Barndollar, "that he has shown himse'f keerless of my feelin's an' I'm mighty lucky to be saved in time."

Cimarron Bill wore a brow of cloudy victory when Jack made his report, while Rattlesnake Sanders swore in a discouraged way. As for Mr. Masterson, he counseled Rattlesnake to be of cheer, and gave it as his belief that Miss Barndollar would come back to his arms in time. Mr. Masterson was on the brink of basing this

conclusion on the fact that Miss Barndollar would not be able to find another who would have her, but caught himself on the verge. He said instead that she was only testing Rattlesnake's love.

"Just let everything go as it lays," concluded Mr. Masterson, consolingly, "and when you are out and around again, it's two for one that you and Calamity'll be like turtledoves."

Rattlesnake said he hoped so, while Cimarron shook his head.

"That's the luckiest laig you ever broke, Rattlesnake," was the mysterious remark of Cimarron as the conference adjourned.

Rattlesnake Sanders, being recovered, invited the judgment of Mr. Masterson concerning his legs.

"What I wants," explained Rattlesnake, "is an opinion at once onprejewdyced an' offishul, an' nacherally I asts Bat."

Mr. Masterson, after a most critical survey of Rattlesnake from, as he himself expressed it, "foretop of fetlock," gave his honour for it that nothing showed amiss.

"Your leg," said Mr. Masterson, "is as straight as it ever was."

"Straighter," chimed in the confident Cimarron, who stood at his elbow. "Rattlesnake's laigs, on account of

bein' frequent storm-soaked about the herds an' then dried preematoorly by camp fires, was a heap warped. Now they're as par'llel as two fiddle strings. I ain't the gent to say it, seein' I set that fracture myse'f, but it's my view Rattlesnake's laigs quits winner on the deal."

These assurances gave mighty satisfaction to Rattlesnake Sanders. So much set up by them was he, that he sought a meeting with Miss Barndollar, meditating in her shell-like ear a loving word. The lady was in the Wright House kitchen, and observing her lover's approach made haste to slam and bolt the door in his adoring face. Sinking under this rebuff, Rattlesnake withdrew to the Alhambra, and became grievously drunk.

The next day, Rattlesnake Sanders again attempted converse with his obdurate sweetheart as she was coming from Mr. Wright's store. She repelled him with double scorn.

"Not bein' desirous," observed Miss Barndollar on this withering occasion, "of the attentions of no sech tarripin as you, I forbids you speakin' to me now or yereafter."

It is to be supposed that a deal of Miss Barndollar's hardness was the growth of pique. Now that the unreasonable character of her surgical demands had been demonstrated, her resentment was multiplied. Also, be-

cause of this second effort at an interview, she complained to Mr. Masterson.

"Be you Sheriff of Ford I'd like for to ast?" she demanded.

"Why?" asked Mr. Masterson, humble but defensive. Mr. Masterson owned a hare's heart where a woman was concerned, and his instinct was for the fugitive and the non-committal. Wherefore he put the query, being heedful to throw into his tone a propititating quaver of apology: "Why? What's fetched loose?"

"Nothin'," returned Miss Barndollar, in her most icy manner, "only I dee-mands protection from that profligate." Here she pointed a chilling finger at the forlorn Rattlesnake who, with head bowed and in an attitude of deepest dejection, stood leaning in the Long Branch door.

"Who, Rattlesnake?" returned Mr. Masterson, with a gentle purpose of reconciliation. "Why, he dotes on you! He loves you like a prairie fire."

"Which the love," said Miss Barndollar, with a sudden vehemence that sent shafts of terror to the soul of Mr. Masterson, "of sech miscreants is the worst outrage they can commit. I'm a weak female, an' I dee-mands protection. Likewise, you'd better give it to me, Bat Masterson, or I'll lay up trouble for your gray ha'rs."

"Taking her up one side and down the other, Rattlesnake," observed Mr. Masterson, in the confab which in

deference to the threats of Miss Barndollar he deemed it wise to hold with that young man, "my notion is that you'd better hit the trail for the White Woman, an' give Calamity a chance to cool. She's a whole lot heated just now, but most likely in a month, or may be in two, it'll be safe to say 'Howdy!' to her, and bid her the time of day."

"Then you'd give her up?" asked the mournful Rattlesnake.

"Only for a spell," replied Mr. Masterson, cheerfully. "But you see yourself there's nothing to be gained by hankering 'round her at this time. The way she feels you couldn't get near enough to her to hand her a ripe peach. Later, it'll be different, and I shall hope to shake a moccasin at your wedding."

Rattlesnake mused a moment, and then broke forth with unexpected spirit.

"Which I'll take your steer, Bat. Also, it's the last I'll have to do with that Calamity. I shore should not regret surrenderin' a lady so narrow as to hold that the only evidence a gent can give of his affection is to go about cripplin' himse'f promiscus."

"Now don't come to any rash decisions," urged the prudent Mr. Masterson. "Dodge wants those nuptials to come off, and if you'll give Calamity time to round on herself, they will. She's only a bit peevish with you for

getting well, but that'll fade away. You go back to your cattle, Rattlesnake, and leave me to ride herd on Calamity. The moment she begins to melt I'll send you word."

It has been the puzzle of every age that woman, with her infinite superiority over man in all that is morally, mentally and physically beautiful, should be seldom or never satisfied. Within three days after Rattlesnake Sanders rode away, Miss Barndollar met Mr. Masterson in the thoroughfares of Dodge and, with tears guttering her freckled cheeks, openly charged upon him the crime of their cruel separation.

"Rattlesnake's the only gent I ever loved!" she sobbed, "an' yere you onfeelin'ly cuts in an' stampedes him out o' my very arms."

Mr. Masterson was somewhat discouraged, and extricated himself from the interview with what polite speed he might. None the less, about the roots of his soul he felt a self-gratulatory flutter. His remedy had worked; his advice was justified. He had recommended for the haughty coldness of Miss Barndollar a course of what Christian Scientists would describe as "absent treatment" and here was the lady yielding to it like a willow to the wind. Mr. Masterson had cause for exultation, and unbent moderately to that sentiment. Withal he was practical, and lost no time in moving to reunite

the lovers. In this, however, Mr. Masterson was guilty of an error. He dispatched Cimarron to bring in Rattlesnake, when he should have sent the sympathetic Jack.

"Go over," said Mr. Masterson to Cimarron, "and break the news to Rattlesnake. Tell him he wins, and that there's nothing now to do but consider Calamity's feelings."

Cimarron Bill sullenly threw a saddle on a pony, and pointed away into the desolate north. His heart was not for this journey; it was to him as though he were summoning Rattlesnake not for his marriage but for his execution.

"Bat's takin' a heap on himse'f!" he muttered. "As for me; I washes my hands of the whole play."

Mr. Masterson said afterward that Cimarron Bill, in that matter of the love-coil between Miss Barndollar and Rattlesnake, betrayed a side of his character hitherto unknown. Mr. Masterson should have reflected. Never before had he been called upon to consider Cimarron while under what peculiar pressures were here exerted. Deep within the inner recesses of Cimarron's nature, abode objections to matrimony as rooted as the hills.

"An' in partic'lar," Cimarron had observed, when once he mooted the subject with Mr. Short as part of a review they were then and there making of the conjugal experiences of Mr. McBride and Bridget, "an' in partic'lar I

contends that, if the world must have such things as matrimony, then no gent should be pinned down to jest one wife. An' for this reason," he continued, waving an impressive paw: "It ain't good sense. Is it good farobank sense to put your whole bundle on one kyard? No. Then it ain't good weddin' sense for to resk your whole heart on one lady. She may fall to lose, an' then where be you at? It's my idee that if a party must go ag'inst this weddin' game, he'll be safer if he spreads his bets."

Holding fast to these beliefs, Cimarron Bill rode forth full of an unconscious willingness to play the marplot. He would deliver the message of Mr. Masterson; but he would deliver it in such fashion that, when the worst occurred, as it hereafter—according to his thinking—must most certainly occur, he, Cimarron, could felicitate himself with the reflection that he had in no sort contributed towards bringing that worst about. He would bear the message of Mr. Masterson; he would also proffer warnings all his own. Should the locoed Rattlesnake then persist in riding open-eyed to Dodge and to destruction—why, his blood be on his head!

It was in this frame that Cimarron Bill sat down to flap-jacks with Rattlesnake Sanders that night at the latter's camp on the White Woman. And this was the conversation that passed between the pair:

"I've been sent over to rope you up, Rattlesnake,"

quoth Cimarron. "Calamity says you're to wash off your warpaint an' report at the agency."

"Does she still adhere to them demands about bustin' my laig?" asked Rattlesnake. "Not that it much matters," he added hastily, for the doughty resolve to see no more of Miss Barndollar, expressed to Mr. Masterson, had long since oozed away, "not that it matters. The round-ups are eight weeks away, an' I'd easy be able to ride by then."

After this exchange the two munched wordless flapjacks, diversified by mouthfuls of salt pork. Rattlesnake Sanders broke the silence.

"Then I takes it we starts back by sun-up."

"Rattlesnake," observed Cimarron Bill, with a pompous solemnity that was not wanting in effect upon his auditor, "you've come to a bad, boggy, quicksand crossin'. My advice is not to jump your pony off the bank, but ride in slow."

"As how?" asked Rattlesnake Sanders, somewhat mystified.

"You think I'm honest, don't you?" demanded Cimarron.

"Shore, I think you're honest," returned Rattlesnake Sanders. Then, cautiously: "But still I allers sort o' allowed you had you're honesty onder control."

"Well, this is the straight goods at any rate," said

Cimarron. "Thar's two kinds of folks you must never surrender to: ladies an' Injuns. Surrender to either is the shore preloode to torture. For you, now, to go surgin' rapturously into Dodge, like a drunkard to a barbecue, would be the crownin' disaster of your c'reer."

"Whatever then should be my little game?"

"It's this a-way: I said you can't afford to surrender to Injuns an' ladies. But you can make treaties with 'em. That gives you a chance to preeserve yourse'f for yourse'f. What you ought to do is plant yourse'f as solid as a gob of mud, an' send back word that you're thinkin' it over."

"But s'pose Calamity goes in the air, an' says it's all off?"

"That's a resk no brave man should refoose to take. You want to remember that she slammed a door in your face; that she set Bat to run you out o' camp." These reminders clearly stiffened Rattlesnake Sanders. "For you to surrender, unconditional, would incite her to new crooelties that would lay over them former inhumanities like a king-full lays over a pa'r of treys. Once," went on Cimarron, who began to be intoxicated with his own eloquence, "once a party back in St. Looney shows me a picture of a man chained to a rock, an' a turkey buzzard t'arin' into him, beak an' claw. He said it was a sport named Prometheus bein' fed upon by vultures. In my

pore opinion that party was barkin' at a knot. The picture wasn't meant for Prometheus an' the vultures. The painter who daubs it had nothin' on his mind but jest to show, pictor'ally, exactly what marriage is like. It was nothin' more nor less than that gifted genius' notion of a married man done in colours."

This outburst so moulded the hopes and fears, especially the fears, of Rattlesnake that he gave himself completely to the guidance of Cimarron Bill.

"I'm to stand a pat hand," said Rattlesnake tentatively, "an' you'll go cavortin' back an' tell Calamity I'll let her know."

"An' yet," interposed Cimarron Bill, "I think on that p'int I'd better be the bearer of a note in writin'. Ladies is plenty imaginative, an' if I takes to packin' in sech messages, verbal, Calamity may allow I'm lyin', an' lay for me."

There was no material for letter-making about the camp. The ingenious Cimarron suggested an "Ingun letter." Acting on his own happy proposal he tore a small board from the top of a box that had held a dozen cans of corn, and set to work with charcoal. Cimarron Bill drew in one corner what might have passed for the sketch of a woman, while the center was adorned with an excited antelope in full flight, escaping over a ridge.

"I'll mark the antelops, 'Bar D'," said Cimarron, "so's she'll know it's you, Bar D bein' your brand."

"But whatever is Calamity to onderstand by them totems?"

"Nothin' only that you're goin' to be a heap hard to ketch," replied Cimarron. "It'll teach her your valyoo."

The antelope looked vastly like a disfigured goat, and the resemblance disturbed Rattlesnake.

"That'll be all right," returned Cimarron, confidently; "I'll explain that it's an antelops. All pictures has to be explained."

When Cimarron Bill laid before Miss Barndollar the message embodied in that "Injun letter," she was so swept away by woe that even the hardened messenger was shocked. More and worse: Miss Barndollar, with a lack of logic for which her sex has celebration, laid these new troubles, as she had the old, at the door of Mr. Masterson.

"You druv him from me!" cried Miss Barndollar, as she reproached Mr. Masterson with her loss. "In your heartlessness you druv him from me! An' now, although Sheriff of this yere county, you fails to restore him to my heart." Throughout that day and the next Miss Barndollar made it a practice to burst into tears at sight of Mr. Masterson. "Which I wants my Rattlesnake," she wailed.

Mr. Masterson was turning desperate. This mood found display in an exclamation that was wrung from him while refreshing his weary soul in the Long Branch.

"There's no use talking, Luke," observed Mr. Masterson, turning in his despair to Mr. Short, "Dodge can't stand this! Calamity must and shall be married! If Rattlesnake won't have her, some other man must."

In making this last remark Mr. Masterson let his glance fall by chance on Cimarron Bill. That determined person was startled to the core.

"You needn't look at me!" he roared. "Which I gives notice I'll never be married alive!"

"No one's thinking of you, Cimarron," retorted Mr. Masterson, and the suspicious one breathed more evenly.

Mr. Masterson and Mr. Short consulted in low tones across the counter. At last Mr. Short straightened up as one who is clear, and said:

"Calamity in effect offers herse'f to this Rattlesnake person, an' he equiv'cates. Thar's two things in this republic which no white man has a license to decline; one's the presidency, an' t'other's a lady. This Rattlesnake has no rights left."

"But," said Mr. Masterson, hesitating over the point, "I don't quite see my way clear—as Sheriff."

"Speakin' technicle, you're c'rrect," observed Mr. Short. "An' it's thar where you makes the shift. Nail

him for shootin' up Kell that time. You-all knows me, Bat," continued Mr. Short. "I'm a mighty conserv'tive man, speshully about other folks' love affairs. An' yet I gives it as my judgment that steps should be took."

Mr. Masterson, bidding Cimarron Bill follow with a buckboard, started for the White Woman.

It was in the afternoon of the next day, and Rattlesnake Sanders was seated by his fire, wrapped in gloomy thought.

"Hands up!" was his earliest notice of the threatening nearness of Mr. Masterson who, dismounting two hundred yards away and beyond a swell, had crept cat-foot upon the camp. "Hands up! You're wanted for creasing Kelly!"

Quick as thought, Rattlesnake was on his feet. In a moment his hand as though by instinct slipped to the butt of his Colt's. Sharp as was his work, Mr. Masterson's was even brisker. With the first shadow of resistance, he sent a bullet into Rattlesnake's leg—the other leg. The shock sent the unlucky Rattlesnake spinning like a top. He fell at full length, and before he might pull himself together Mr. Masterson had him disarmed.

"What for a racket is this?" demanded Rattlesnake fiercely, when he had collected his wits and his breath. "What's the meanin' of this yere bluff?"

"Speaking unofficially," returned Mr. Masterson, "it

means that you're about to become a married man. If you think Dodge will sit idly by while you break the heart of that child Calamity, you're off."

"Calamity!" exclaimed Rattlesnake, in a maze of astonishment. "Which I was jest tryin' to figger out a way to squar' myse'f with that angel when you plugged me! If you'd said 'Calamity!' instead of 'Kelly' it wouldn't have called for a gun play. I'd have followed you back to town on all fours, like a collie dog."

"Why didn't you report, then, when I sent for you? What did you mean by sending in that infernal hieroglyphic?"

"Me an' Cimarron was simply holdin' out for guarantees," groaned Rattlesnake.

"You and Cimarron!" cried Mr. Masterson indignantly.

From over a knoll a clatter was heard, and Cimarron Bill came rattling into camp with the buckboard. This may or may not have had to do with Mr. Masterson's failure to finish his last remark. Possibly that adage, which tells of how soon things mend when least is said, occurred to him as a reason for holding his peace.

The perforated Rattlesnake was comfortably mowed away in a Wright House bed, his beloved Calamity bending over him. When the first joy of their meeting had been given time to wear itself away, the lady was called

into the hall by Mr. Masterson. Mr. Short was with him.

"I don't want to be understood, Calamity," said Mr. Masterson, "as trying to crowd your hand, but the preacher will be here at 7 P. M., at which hour you and Rattlesnake are to become man and wife. That bullet is, I confess, an unusual feature in a honeymoon; but for all that the wedding must take place, per schedule, as I've got to get this thing off my mind."

"As for that bullet in Rattlesnake," added Mr. Short, "it's a distinct advantage. It'll make him softer an' more sentimental. Which a gent gets sentimental in direct proportion as you shoot him up. I've known two bullets, properly planted, to set a party to writin' poetry."

"Do I onderstand, Bat," asked Mr. Kelly, as following the wedding they were wending to the Alhambra with a plan to drink good fortune to the happy pair; "do I onderstand that you used my name in gunnin' for this bridegroom?"

"That Calamity girl had me locoed," explained Mr. Masterson apologetically. "I'd been harassed to a degree, Kell, that left me knockin' 'round in the situation like a blind dog in a meat shop, hardly knowing right from wrong. All I wanted was to marry him to Calamity, and I seized on your name to land the trick."

“Still,” objected Mr. Kelly, mildly, “you ought not to have founded the play on his wingin’ me. While I won’t say that his shootin’ me was in the best of taste that time, after all it wasn’t more’n a breach of manners, an’ not in any of its aspects, as I onderstand, a voylation of the law. It wasn’t fair to me to make him marry that Calamity lady for that.”

“Besides,” urged Cimarron Bill, who had come up, “them nuptials is onconstitootional, bein’ in defiance of the clause which declar’s that no onusual or crooel punishments shall be meted out. Which I knows it’s thar, because Bob Wright showed it to me at the time I urged steppin’ old Bobby Gill’s lickier for a week to punish him for pesterin’ ’round among us mourners the day of Bridget’s fooneral.”

CHAPTER XII.

DIPLOMACY IN DODGE.

IT was a subject of common regret when Mr. Masterson, as Sheriff of Ford, decided to resign. He had shown himself equipped for the position, being by nature cool and just and honest, and disposed to accuracy in all things, especially in his shooting. It was those laws prohibitive of the sale of strong drink throughout the State of Kansas that prompted the resignation of Mr. Masterson.

“The rounding up of horse thieves and hold-ups, Bob,” observed Mr. Masterson to Mr. Wright, “is legitimate work. And I don’t mind burning a little powder with them if such should be their notion. But I draw the line at pulling on a gentleman, and dictating water as a beverage.”

Whereupon Mr. Masterson laid down his office, and Mr. Wright and Mr. Short and Mr. Kelly and Mr.

Trask and Mr. Tighlman and Cimarron Bill sorrowfully gathered at the Wright House and gave a dinner in his honor. Following, the dinner, Mr. Masterson translated himself to Arizona, while Dodge relieved its feelings with the circulation of a document which read:

“We, the undersigned, agree to pay the sums set opposite our names to the widow and orphans of the gent who first informs on a saloonkeeper.”

The white American is a mammal of unusual sort. He doesn't mind when his officers of government merely rob him, or do no more than just saddle and ride him in favour of some pillaging monopoly. But the moment those officers undertake to tell him what he shall drink and when he shall drink it, he goes on the warpath. Thus was it with the ebullient folk of Dodge on the dry occasion of Prohibition. The paper adverted to gained many signatures, and promised a fortune to those mourning ones it so feelingly described.

When Mr. Masterson laid down his regalia as Sheriff and the public realised that he had pulled his six-shooters, officially, for the last time, a sense of loss filled the bosoms of those who liked a peaceful life. There was another brood which felt the better pleased. Certain dissolute ones, who arrive at ruddiest blossom in a half-baked Western camp, made no secret of their satisfaction. Withal, they despised Mr. Masterson for the certainty

of his pistol practise, and that tacit brevity wherewith he set his guns to work.

Perhaps of those who rejoiced over the going of Mr. Masterson, a leading name was that of Bear Creek Johnson. Certainly, Bear Creek jubilated with a greater degree of noise than did the others. Having money at the time, Bear Creek came forth upon what he meant should be a record spree.

The joyful Bear Creek was fated to meet with check. He had attained to the first stages of that picnic which he planned, "jest beginnin' to onbuckle," as he himself expressed it, when he was addressed upon the subject by Mr. Wright. The latter was standing in the doorway of his store, and halted Bear Creek, whooping up the street. Mr. Wright owned a past wherein rifle smoke and courage were equally commingled to make an honoured whole. Aware of these credits to the fame of Mr. Wright, Bear Creek ceased whooping to hear what he might say. As Bear Creek paused, Mr. Wright from the doorway bent upon him a somber glance.

"I only wanted to say, Bear Creek," observed Mr. Wright, "that if I were you I wouldn't tire the town with any ill-timed gayety. If the old vigilance committee *should* come together, and if it *should* decide to clean up the camp, the fact that you owe me money wouldn't save

you. I should never let private interests interfere with my duty to the town, nor a lust for gain keep me from voting to hang a criminal. It would be no help to him that I happened to be his creditor.”

This rather long oration threw cold water upon the high spirits of Bear Creek Johnson. He whooped no more, and at the close of Mr. Wright's remarks returned to his accustomed table in the Alamo, where he devoted the balance of the evening to a sullen consumption of rum.

Several months elapsed, and Dodge had felt no ill effects from Prohibition. Whiskey was obtainable at usual prices in the Alamo, the Alhambra, the Long Branch, the Dance Hall, and what other haunts made a feature of liquid inspiration. Dodge was satisfied. Dodge was practical and never complained of any law until it was enforced. Since such had not been the case with those statutes of prohibition, Dodge was content. The herds as aforetime came up from Texas in the fall; as aforetime the cowboys mirthfully divided their equal money between whiskey, monte and quadrilles. The folk of Dodge thereat were pleased. No one, official, had come to molest them or make them afraid, and a first resentful interest in prohibition was dying down.

This condition of calm persisted undisturbed until one afternoon when the telegraph operator came over to the

Alhambra, pale and shaken, bearing a yellow message. The message told how the Attorney General, and the President of the Prohibition League were to be in Dodge next day, with a fell purpose of making desolate that jocund hamlet by an enforcement of the laws. The visitors would dismantle Dodge of its impudent defiance; they would destroy it with affidavits, plow and sow its site with salt in the guise of warrants of arrest. When they were finished, the Alhambra, the Long Branch, the Alamo, the Dance Hall and kindred kindly emporiums would be as springs that had run dry, while, captives in the town's calaboose, their proprietors wore irons and languished. To add insult to injury, those exalted ones promised that when they had cleansed Dodge and placed it upon a rumless footing, they would address what citizens were not in jail and strive to show them the error of their sodden ways and teach them to lead a happier and a soberer life.

When Mr. Masterson withdrew to Arizona, he did not expect to soon return to Dodge. He found, however, that despite Tombstone and its pleasures he dragged a sense of loneliness about, and oft caught himself wondering what Mr. Wright and Mr. Kelly and Mr. Short and the rest of the boys were doing. At last, giving as excuse, that he ought to put a wire fence about a sand-blown stretch of desert that was his and which lay blister-



IN DISAPPROVAL OF ITS DRINKS.

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ing on the south side of the Arkansas in the near vicinity of Dodge, he resolved upon a visit. He would remain a fortnight. It would be a vacation—he hadn't had one since the Black Kettle campaign—and doubtless serve to wear away the edge of those regrets which preyed upon him when now he no longer conserved the peace of Dodge with a Colt's-45. There comes a joy with office holding, even when the office is one attractive of invidious lead, and in the newness of laying down that post of Sheriff, Mr. Masterson should not be criticised because the ghost of an ache shot now and then across his soul.

The first day of Mr. Masterson's return was devoted to a renewal of old ties—a bit parched, with ten months of Arizona. The second day, Mr. Masterson invested in wandering up and down and indulging himself in a tender survey of old landmarks. Here was the signpost against which he steadied himself when he winged that obstreperous youth from the C-bar-K, who had fired his six-shooter into the Alhambra in disapproval of Mr. Kelly's wares. It was a good shot; for the one resentful of Alhambra whiskey was fully one hundred yards away and on the run. Later, the C-bar-K boy admitted that the Alhambra whiskey was not so bad, and his slam-bang denunciation of it uncalled for. At that, Mr. Masterson, first paying a doctor to dig his lead from the boy's shoulder, gave him his freedom again.

"If Kell's whiskey had been really bad," said Mr. Masterson, "I would have been the last to interfere with the resentment of a gentleman who had suffered from it. But I was familiar with the brand, and knew, therefore, how that cowboy unlimbered in merest wantonness. Under such conditions, I could not, and do my duty, permit him to go unrebuked."

Half a block further, and Mr. Masterson stood in front of the First National Bank. Mr. Masterson recalled this arena of finance as the place wherein he borrowed the shotgun with which he cooled the ardour of Mr. Bowman when that warrior made the long journey from Trinidad with the gallant purpose, announced widely in advance, of shooting up the town. Looking into the double muzzle of the 10-gauge, the doughty one from Trinidad saw that which changed his plans. Turning his hardware over to Mr. Masterson, he took a drink in amity with that hard-working officer, and then embarked upon a festival, conducted with a scrupulous regard for the general peace, which lasted four full days.

Across from the bank was the warehouse, the wooden walls of which displayed the furrows ploughed by Mr. Masterson's bullets on the day when he fought the three gentleman from Missouri. They were weather-stained, those furrows, with the rains that had intervened. Mr. Masterson being a sentimentalist sighed over his trade-

marks, and thought of those pleasant times when they were fresh. Fifty yards beyond stood the little hotel where the dead were carried. It was a good hotel, and in that hour celebrated for its bar; remembering which, Mr. Masterson repaired thither in the name of thirst.

Mr. Masterson was leaning on the counter, and telling the proprietor that the lustre of his whiskey had been in no sort dimmed, when the word—just then delivered by the wires—reached him of that proposed invasion in the cause of prohibition. It was Mr. Wright who bore the tidings, and the face of that merchant prince showed grave.

“Well,” said Mr. Masterson, in tones of relief, “you see, Bob, that I was right when I resigned. I’d be in a box now if I were Sheriff.”

“What is your idea of a course?” asked Mr. Wright. “It stands to reason that the camp can’t go dry; at the same time I wouldn’t want to see it meander into trouble.”

It was thought wise by Mr. Wright, after exhaustively conferring with Mr. Masterson, to call a meeting of the male inhabitants of Dodge. There might be discovered in a multitude of counsel some pathway that would lead them out of this law-trap, while permitting them to drink.

Mr. Wright presided at the meeting, which was large.

There were speeches, some for peace and some for war, but none which opened any gate. Dodge was where it started, hostile, but undecided. Somebody called on Mr. Masterson; what would he suggest? Mr. Masterson, being no orator and fluent only with a gun, tried to escape. However, over-urged by Mr. Wright, he spake as follows:

“Gentlemen,” said Mr. Masterson, “I was so recently your Sheriff that the habit of upholding law and maintaining order is still strong upon me, and it may be that, thus crippled, I am but ill qualified to judge of the wisdom of ones who have counseled killing and scalping these prohibition people who will favour Dodge to-morrow afternoon. My impression, however, is that such action, while perhaps natural under the circumstances, would be grossly premature. It would bring down the State upon us, and against such odds even Dodge might not sustain herself. All things considered, my advice is this: Close every saloon an hour before our visitors arrive, and keep them closed while they remain. Every man—for there would be no sense in enduring hardships uselessly—should provide himself in advance with say a gallon. The saloons closed, our visitors would be powerless. What a man doesn’t see he doesn’t know; and those emissaries of a tyrannous prohibition would be unable to make oath. In the near finish, they would leave. Once

they had departed, Dodge could again go forward on its liberty-loving way. 'Those are my notions, gentlemen; and above all I urge that nothing like violence be indulged in. Let our visitors enter and depart in peace. Do not put it within their power to say that Dodge was not a haven of peace. You must remember that not alone your liberty but your credit is at stake, and play a quiet hand according.'

While Mr. Wright and that conservative contingent which he represented approved the counsel of Mr. Masterson, there were others who condemned it. At the head of these latter was the turbulent Bear Creek Johnson. After the meeting had adjourned, that riot-urging individual branded the words of Mr. Masterson as pusillanimous. For himself, the least that Bear Creek would consent to was the roping up of the visitors the moment they appeared. They were to be dragged at the hocks of a brace of cow-ponies until such time as they renounced their iniquitous mission, and promised respect to Dodge's appetites and needs.

"As for that Masterson party," said the bitter Bear Creek, who being five drinks ahead was pot-valiant. "what's he got to do with the play? He got cold feet an' quit ten months ago. Now he allows he'll come buttin' in an' tell people what kyards to draw, an' how to fill an' bet their hands. Some gent ought to wallop a gun

over his head. An' if some gent don't, I sort o' nach-erally reckon I'll about do the trick myse'f."

Since Bear Creek Johnson reserved these views for souls who were in sympathy therewith, meanwhile concealing the same from such as Mr. Masterson and Mr. Wright, there arose no one to contradict him. Made bold by silent acquiescence, and exalted of further drinks, Bear Creek drew about him an outcast coterie in the rear room of Mr. Webster's Alamo. It was there, with Bear Creek to take the lead, they laid their heads together for the day to come.

There be men on earth who are ever ready for trouble that, specifically, isn't trouble of their own. They delight in dancing when others pay the fiddler. Numbers of such gathered with the radical Bear Creek; and being gathered, he and they pooled their wicked wits in devising fardels for those expected enemies.

When, next day, our executives of prohibition came into Dodge, they were amazed, while scarcely gratified, to find every rum shop locked up fast and tight. The Dance Hall, the Alhambra, the Long Branch and the Alamo, acting on the hint of Mr. Masterson, had closed their doors, and not a drink of whiskey, not even for rattlesnake-bite, could have been bought from one end of the street to the other. Not that this paucity of rum-selling seemed to bear heavily upon the community. There were

never so many gentlemen of Dodge whom one might describe as wholly and successfully drunk. The boardwalks were thronged with their staggering ranks, as the visitors made a tour of the place.

The visitors were pompous, well-fed men of middle age; and while they said they had come to perform a duty, one skilled in man-reading might have told at a glance that their great purpose was rather to tickle vanity, and demonstrate how unsparing would be their spirit when the question became one of moral duty.

When the duo first appeared their faces wore a ruddy, arrogant hue. As they went about upon that tour of inspection they began to pale. There was something in the lowering eye of what fragment of the public looked to the leadership of Bear Creek Johnson, to whiten them.

Pale as linen three times bleached, following fifteen minutes spent about the streets, the visitors—their strutting pomposity visibly reduced—made a shortest wake to Gallon's, being the hostelry they designed to honour with their custom. Gallon's was a boarding-house distinguished as "Prohibition," and the visitors proposed to illustrate it and give it fashion in the estimation of sober men, by bestowing upon it their patronage. Two hours later, the proprietor would have paid money to dispense with the advertisement.

Once the invaders were housed, by twos and fives and tens, the disengaged inhabitants of Dodge began to assemble in front of Gallon's. Some came in a temper of curiosity. The band with Bear Creek Johnson, however, entertained a different feeling. Their taste was for the strenuous. They set forth this fact with imitations of the yelp of the coyote. Withal, they were constantly closing up about the refuge of the visitors, until they stood, a packed and howling mob, with which it was no more than a question of minutes before ugly action would begin.

Bear Creek Johnson was in the van, fostering and fomenting a sentiment for violence. The unworthy Bear Creek was not lacking in qualities of leadership; he realised, as by an instinct, that a mob must have time to ripen before it is put to work. Wherefore, Bear Creek, while cursing and threatening with the rest, delayed. He paused, as it were, with his thumb on the angry pulse of the multitude, waiting to seize the moment psychological.

Hemmed in by four hundred pushing, threatening, cursing, human wolves, those agents of prohibition whitely sat and shivered. They knew their peril; also they felt that sense of utter helplessness which will only come to men when forced to face the brainless fury of a mob. What should be done? What could

be done? In that moment of extremity the proprietor of the boarding-house, with the fear of death upon him, could think of nothing beyond sending for Mr. Wright.

To be courier in this hour of strain a girl of twelve was sent out by a rear door. There was craft in this selection of a messenger. No Western mob, however bloody of intention, would dream of interfering with a girl. Besides, Mr. Wright would never refuse a girl's request.

Mr. Wright might have been as pleased had he not been called upon. To oppose the insurrectionists was neither a work of pleasure nor of safety, and the opportunity to thus put himself in feud with a half regiment of men whose blood was up, and with whom when the smoke of battle blew aside he must still do business, could not be called a boon. But the little girl's lips were blue with terror, and her frightened eyes showed round and big, as she besought Mr. Wright to save the life of her father—it was he to be proprietor of Gallon's—and the lives of those visiting gentlemen, representative of prohibition. Getting wearily up from the poker game in which he was employed, Mr. Wright made ready to go with the little girl.

“You had better come too, Bat,” said Mr. Wright, addressing Mr. Masterson. “I think you can do more

with a Dodge mob than I can. They've seen more of your shooting."

"Of course I'll go, Bob," returned Mr. Masterson, laying down a reluctant hand in which dwelt a pair of aces—a highly hopeful pair before the draw!—"of course I'll go. But it seems hard that I must leave just when the hands are beginning to run my way. I wish Bear Creek had put off this uprising another hour. I'd have been a mile on velvet."

When Mr. Masterson and Mr. Wright arrived at the seat of war, the mob was more or less impressed and its howls lost half their volume. Mr. Masterson and Mr. Wright walked through the close-set ranks, and went in by the front door. No back door for Mr. Masterson and Mr. Wright; especially under the eyes of ones whom they must presently outface.

"What is your desire, gentlemen?" asked Mr. Masterson, when he and Mr. Wright found themselves with the beleaguered ones.

"There is a train in an hour and thirty minutes," replied the Attorney General. He showed the colour of a sheet, but his upper lip was stiffer than was that of his companion, which twitched visibly. "Can you put us aboard?"

"Now I don't see why not," returned Mr. Masterson.

"Don't see why not!" exclaimed the President of the

Prohibition League; "don't see why not! You hear those murderers outside, and you don't see why not!" It should be mentioned in the gentleman's defence that his nerves were a-jangle. "Don't see why not!" he murmured, sinking back as a deeper roar came from without.

"Don't let the racket outside disturb you," said Mr. Masterson in a reassuring tone. "We'll manage to get that outfit back in its corral."

"But do you guarantee our safety?" gasped the other.

"As to that," returned Mr. Masterson, "you gentlemen understand that I am not issuing life insurance. What I say is this: Whoever gets you will have to go over me to make the play."

Mr. Masterson and Mr. Wright conversed apart. There was no haste; the mob would confine itself to threats and curses while they remained in the house.

"Perhaps I'd better give 'em a talk, Bob," said Mr. Masterson, at the close of their confab. "There are two things to do. We must get rid of Bear Creek. And we must let it look like the rest of 'em had taken a trick. I think I'll suggest that we make our visitors give us those temperance speeches. They won't want to do it; and if we let the boys sort o' compel them to be eloquent, they'll most likely quit satisfied. If we don't do something of the kind, it's my opinion they'll take a shot at

us before ever we place these shuddering strangers on the train."

"Do what you reckon best," returned Mr. Wright. "I'll back your game."

Mr. Masterson opened the front door and, with Mr. Wright, stepped forth. He considered the mob a moment with a quiet eye, and then raised his hand as if to invite attention.

"Gentlemen," said he, "if I talk to you, it's on your account. The people inside, in whose honour you've assembled, intend to board the first train for the East."

"Board nothin'! Let's swing 'em off!" cried a cowboy from south of the river. He was carrying his lariat in his hand; as he spoke he whirled the loop about his head, knocking off the sombreros of those nearest him. "Let's swing 'em off!" he shouted.

"I'll swing you off, if you don't give that rope a rest!" returned an irate one, unhatted, and with that he collared the child of cows, and threw him backward into the press. "Go on, Bat," said this auxiliary, having abated the cowboy and his rope; "give us the layout of your little game."

"My little game," continued Mr. Masterson calmly, "is this: I've passed my word that no harm shall come to these people. And for this reason. If they were even a little injured, the prohibition papers would make

bloody murder of it. Inside of hours, the soldiers from the Fort would be among us, and the town under martial law. They would be sending you prairie dogs to bed at nine o'clock, with a provost marshal to tuck you in; and none of you would like that. I wouldn't like it myself."

"Let the soldiers come!" shouted Bear Creek Johnson from the extreme wing of the mob. Bear Creek had drawn from the whiskey under his belt a more than normal courage. Moreover, he felt that it was incumbent upon him to make a stand. Considering those plans he had laid, and which included driving Mr. Masterson out of town should he have the impudence to stand in their way, Bear Creek knew that otherwise he would be disparaged in the estimation of his followers and suffer in his good repute. He resolved to put forward a bold face, and bully Mr. Masterson. "Let the soldiers come!" Bear Creek repeated. "We won't ask Bat Masterson to give us any help."

"Is that you, Bear Creek?" observed Mr. Masterson, turning on that popular idol.

Mr. Masterson stepped off the porch and walked down upon the grass. This brought Bear Creek clear of the herd. No one, in case Bear Creek became a target, would be in line of Mr. Masterson's fire. Bear Creek noticed this as something sinister.

"I reckon now," continued Mr. Masterson, still edging in between Bear Creek and his reserves, "that in case of trouble, you would take command, and run the soldiers out." Then, solemnly, while Mr. Wright from the porch scanned those to the rear of Mr. Masterson for an earliest hostile sign: "Bear Creek, you've been holding forth that you're a heap bad, but I, for one, am unconvinced. I understand how you snuffed out the soldier at Fort Lyons; but I also understand how that soldier was dead drunk. I've likewise heard how you bumped off the party on the Cimarron; at the same time that party was plumb tender and not heeled. Wherefore, I decline to regard those incidents as tests. You must give Dodge a more conclusive proof of gameness before you can dictate terms to the camp. You've got your irons! What do you wear 'em for?"

As though to point the question, Mr. Masterson's six-shooter jumped from its belt, and exploded in the direction of Bear Creek. The big bullet tore the ground two inches from his right foot. With a screech of dismay, Bear Creek soared into the air.

Even while Mr. Masterson was talking, Bear Creek Johnson's fortitude had been sweating itself away. The catlike creeping in between him and his constituents had also served to unhinge him. Indeed he was in such frame that the sudden explosion of Mr. Masterson's pistol ex-

ploded with it his hysteria. Bear Creek could do nothing but make the shameful screeching leap described.

Away went his nerves like a second flock of frightened sheep when, just as he felt the grass again beneath him, there came a second flash, and a second bullet buried itself in the ground, grazing his left foot. Bear Creek made another skyward leap, and evolved another horror-bitten screech to which the first was as a whisper. When he came down, a third bullet ripped a furrow between his legs.

Bear Creek Johnson had so far recovered possession of himself that at the third shot he didn't leap. He ran. The ignoble Bear Creek fled from the blazing Mr. Masterson with a speed that would have amazed the antelopes.

"It's as I thought!" remarked Mr. Masterson, regretfully; "quit like a dog, and never even reached for his gun!" Then, returning to the public, which had been vastly interested by those exercises in which Bear Creek had performed, Mr. Masterson resumed. "As I was saying, when Bear Creek interrupted me, I've given my word to the folks inside that they shall not meet with injury. But there's one matter upon which, if you'll back me up, I'd like to enter." At this, certain scowls which wrinkled the brows of the more defiant, began to abate by the fraction of a shadow. "These men," went

on Mr. Masterson, "made boasts before they came here that they would speak on temperance and prohibition. I understand, from what they now say, that they have given up this design. I don't like that. I don't want them running into the papers with a lie about the lawlessness of Dodge, and how we wouldn't permit free speech. If I were you, I'd have these Ciceros out, cost what it might, and they'd either make those speeches or give a reason why."

"You're dead right, Bat," cried one enthusiast. "Smoke 'em out! Make 'em talk! If they've got anything ag'inst whiskey, let 'em spit it out. I don't owe whiskey a splinter; an', you bet! these trantlers ain't goin' back to Topeka, poisonin' the public mind, and putting it up that Dodge wasn't safe to talk in."

"Taking the gentleman's remarks," observed Mr. Masterson gravely, "as reflecting the common sentiment, I move you that Mr. Wright be instructed to go to our visitors and say that we're waiting with impatience to hear them on the dual topics of temperance in its moral aspects, and prohibition as a police regulation of the State. Those in favour say, Ay!"

There was a thunder-gust of Ays!

"The Ays have it," confirmed Mr. Masterson. "Bob, will you go inside and get the muzzles off the orators?"

When ready, parade 'em before this enlightened and sympathetic audience, and tell 'em they've never had such a chance to distinguish themselves since the Mexican War."

Mr. Wright withdrew in submission to instructions. While he was absent, Mr. Masterson indulged his audience with a few more words, lowering his voice as though what he said were confidential.

"Mr. Wright," remarked Mr. Masterson, "will shortly appear with our visitors. During the exercises, I trust that nothing trenching upon disturbance will be indulged in. I shall preside; and I need not call attention to the fact that there are still three cartridges in my gun. Also, I might add that I don't always shoot at a party's moccasins and miss."

It was the only thing they could do. With Mr. Masterson and Mr. Wright to give them courage, and despair to lend them grace, those visiting ones spake upon whiskey as the Devil's broth and the hideous evils of intemperance. All things considered, they made excellent addresses. Not the best that was in them, perhaps; but what then? Patrick Henry would have fumbled for a word were he to feel that at any moment an auditor might step forward and edit a faulty sentence with his Colt's. It is to the glory of Dodge, that the orators were broken in upon by nothing more lethal than

applause, while each was made prouder by a whirlwind of cheers when he closed.

It was evening in the Alhambra. Those prohibition folk were distant by one hundred safe and healthful miles, and Dodge had returned to the even tenor of his ways. Suddenly Mr. Wright delivered himself of this reproof.

“There’s one fault I’ve got to find, Bat; there’s one thing I won’t get over soon. Why, I ask you, why, when you had him dead to rights, did you miss that Bear Creek?”

“I know how you feel, Bob,” returned Mr. Masterson in a manner of self-reproach, “and I despair of framing up an apology that will square me with Dodge. Why didn’t I down Bear Creek? It will sound childish”—here Mr. Masterson’s eye took on a twinkle that was sly—“but, Bob, I’m no longer sheriff; and, between us, I’m afraid I don’t shoot true in my private capacity.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RESCUE OF CIMARRON BILL.

OPINION has been ever divided as to the true reason of Ogallala's objection to Cimarron Bill. Some there were who said it was born of Ogallala's jealousy of Dodge, the latter metropolis being as all men know the home of Cimarron. Others held it to be offspring of the childish petulance of Ogallala, which resented the unseemly luck of Cimarron who had played at cards with its citizens. The latter would appear the better solution; for when the committee, which consisted of Mr. Jenkins of the Sheaf of Wheat Saloon, Mr. Sopris and Mr. Smart, notified Cimarron to depart, the ostracism was expressly based upon the good fortune which throughout four nights of draw-poker had waited upon the obnoxious one.

The committee, in a spirit of fairness that did it credit, explained how Ogallala did not intend by its action to accuse Cimarron of having practiced any

fraud. Had such been the case, Ogallala would have hanged him instead of bidding him depart in peace. What was meant came to be no more than this: Ogallala was new and small, and per consequence poor, and could not afford the luxury of Cimarron's presence. Under the circumstance the committee urged him to have avail of the first train that passed through. Leaving with him a time table and the suggestion that he study it, the committee withdrew.

Cimarron Bill was possessed of many of the more earnest characteristics of a bald hornet. Also, he held that the position assumed towards him by Ogallala was in violation of his rights under a scheme of government which guaranteed him life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The last franchise in particular he construed as covering in his favour the privilege of remaining what space he pleased in Ogallala, and diverting himself with cards at the expense of those members of the body politic willing to play with him. Thinking on these lines, he resolved to defy the sentiment of Ogallala, and stay where he was.

In preparation for what might happen, Cimarron Bill repaired to the Midland Hotel and got his six-shooter, which weapon, in compliment to Ogallala, he had theretofore avoided wearing. Being girt for his defence, he wended to the Arcade, a place of refreshment

next neighbour to Mr. Jenkins' Sheaf of Wheat, and seating himself at a table called calmly for a drink. Word of these manœuvres was conveyed to Mr. Jenkins, who as chairman of the notification committee felt compelled to vindicate the dignity of Ogallala.

It was an hour later and, being in the hot middle of an August afternoon, the Sheaf of Wheat was deserted. Likewise was the Arcade, save for the presence of Cimarron Bill. Mr. Jenkins made sure of this by glancing through the window of the Arcade when returning from a brief invented trip to the post-office.

Believing that the time to move had come, Mr. Jenkins arranged a shotgun on the shelf below the level of the Sheaf of Wheat bar. There was a charge of buckshot in each barrel, and Mr. Jenkins entertained hopes of what might be accomplished therewith. When fully organised, Mr. Jenkins took a six-shooter and blazed away at the floor. He relied on the curiosity of Cimarron, certain in this fashion to be aroused, to bring him within range.

Mr. Jenkins was so far correct as to the inquisitive nature of Cimarron Bill that the smoke was still a-curl about the low ceiling of the Sheaf of Wheat when the latter came rushing through the door. But the door of Cimarron's advent was the rear and not the front door, as had been confidently anticipated by Mr. Jenkins. He

had dropped the six-shooter and caught up the Greener with a purpose of potting Cimarron the moment he appeared. This reversal of doors, however, was so disconcerted that in the hurry of wheeling, and because of the nearness of Cimarron, he missed that lively gentleman altogether.

Cimarron Bill replied to Mr. Jenkins with his Colt's-45, and the bullet glancing on the fore-end of the Greener cut away the second, third and little fingers of Mr. Jenkins' left hand. The blow to his nervous system sent Mr. Jenkins to the floor, where, being a prince for prudence and no mean strategist, he remained a-sprawl, feigning death. This pretense imposed upon Cimarron who, after helping himself to a drink at the expense, as he supposed, of Mr. Jenkins' estate, shot a hole through the bar mirror in registration of his contempt, and sauntered into the street.

Mr. Jenkins, following the going of Cimarron Bill, scrambled to his feet, thrust a fresh cartridge into the empty barrel of the Greener, and hastened to the door. Having advantage of the back of Cimarron, that personage being distant forty yards, he poured a charge from the Greener into him. As Cimarron went down, Mr. Jenkins—who was no one to slight his work—unslew the second barrel. It went wild, and did no scathe beyond sending one buckshot through the Ogal-

lala *Harbinger*, which Mr. Sopris, chair tilted against the front of the Cowboy's Rest, was reading, while the balance of the load shattered the front window of that justly popular resort. Mr. Jenkins, believing that the honor of Ogallala had been retrieved, sought the local doctor, while several unengaged members of the public gathered about the prostrate Cimarron.

The luck which had attended upon Cimarron Bill during his stay in Ogallala did not abandon him in his off-and-on duel with Mr. Jenkins. Sundry of those cartridges which were as the provender of the Greener had been filled with bird not buckshot, being designed for the destruction of prairie hens. Mr. Jenkins, in the hurry of reloading that right barrel, had selected a prairie-hen cartridge. So far from resembling one of those diminutive fowls, Cimarron was a gentleman of vitality and powers of recuperation. The birdshot peppered but did not kill. Even as they gazed, those who surrounded Cimarron observed signs of returning life.

This revival of the stricken one bred sorrow in the Ogallala heart; not because of an innate inhumanity, but, as events had adjusted themselves, it would have been better had Mr. Jenkins extinguished Cimarron. There is that unwritten jurisprudence of the gun; and the politer, not to say more honourable, technicalities were peculiarly on the side of Cimarron. If the story

were sent abroad it would serve for the discredit of Ogallala; and a western town is as nervously concerned for its good fame as any woman. Hence the popular sadness over Cimarron's restoration.

Acting for the best under circumstances so discouraging, the public, first caring for Cimarron's pistol in order to preserve a future's quiet, formally placed him under arrest. Then, since Ogallala had no jail and because he lay wounded to helplessness, he was conveyed to the Midland, and Mr. Smart detailed to hold him prisoner. In these steps it is believed that Ogallala planned nothing beyond a version of the affair that should bear upon its own repute as lightly as it might. Beyond saving its skirts from criticism, it would restore Cimarron to a pristine health, and finish by devising ways and means, honourable of course to Ogallala, for letting him go free.

When the doctor had tied up the three finger-stumps of Mr. Jenkins, he repaired to the Midland and picked the shot—number eight, they were—out of Cimarron. Following these improvements, the latter called for a drink; then, addressing himself to Mr. Smart, he exhausted invective upon Ogallala and her manner towards sojourners within her limits.

Cimarron Bill was still in bed and still reviling Ogallala when Mr. Masterson was given a recount of his

troubles. Aside from their several years of friendship, it chanced in times gone by that during a dance-hall rumpus at Tascosa, Cimarron Bill had stood over Mr. Masterson, on the floor with a bullet-shattered knee, and with six-shooters spitting fire held the crowded foe at bay. This, according to the religion of Mr. Masterson, made a claim upon his gratitude which would last while Cimarron lived. Wherefore, and because a Western gratitude is never passive, Mr. Masterson no sooner heard of Cimarron's plight than he started to his relief.

Since he must go by roundabout trails, it was precisely one week from the day of Cimarron's battle with Mr. Jenkins before Mr. Masterson drew into Ogallala, and wrote "William Brown, Hays City," in the account book which the Midland employed in lieu of a more formal register. Also, Mr. Masterson developed an unusual fastidiousness, and asked to be shown the rooms before one was assigned him. The request being complied with, Mr. Masterson in his ramble located Cimarron's room by locating Mr. Smart, who stood or rather sat on guard at the door—for Mr. Smart had brought out a chair to comfort his watch and ward—and chose the room next to it.

"Thar's a prisoner in thar," doubtfully observed the proprietor of the Midland, who was acting as guide to

Mr. Masterson's investigations, "an' as he mostly cusses all night, he may disturb you."

"Disturb me?" repeated the bogus Mr. Brown. "Never! I know of nothing more soothing to the slumbers of an honest man than the howls of the wicked under punishment."

Being installed, Mr. Masterson's earliest care was to provide himself with a demijohn of Midland whiskey; for he had noted an encarmined nose as a facial property of Mr. Smart, and that florid feature inspired a plan. There would be a train from the West at three o'clock A. M.; it was now two o'clock P. M. This would give Mr. Masterson thirteen hours wherein to ripen his device; and thirteen is a fortunate number!

When Mr. Masterson passed Mr. Smart in the hall, bearing—as the Greeks bore gifts—that engaging demijohn, he spake casually yet pleasantly with Mr. Smart; and next, after a fashion perfect in the West, he invited Mr. Smart to sample those wares which the demijohn contained. Mr. Smart tasted, and said it was the Midland's best. Upon this promising discovery Mr. Masterson proposed a second libation, which courtesy Mr. Smart embraced.

Mr. Masterson apologised to Mr. Smart for a thoughtlessness that had asked him to drink with a total stranger. He made himself known to Mr. Smart as

“Mr. Brown of Hays.” Mr. Masterson remarked that he would go abroad in Ogallala about the transaction of what mythical business had brought him to its shores. Meanwhile, the demijohn was just inside his door. Would Mr. Smart do him the honour to cheer his vigils with such references to the demijohn as it might please him to make?

Mr. Masterson was about to depart when a volley of bad words was heard to issue from Cimarron’s room. The voice was strong and full, and fraught of a fine resolution; this delighted Mr. Masterson as showing Cimarron to be in no sort near the door of death. A second volley climbed the transom to reverberate along the hall, and Mr. Masterson, jerking the thumb of inquiry, asked:

“Any gent with him?”

“No,” responded Mr. Smart, leering amiably, albeit indefinitely, “no; he’s plumb alone. He’s jes’ swearin’ at a mark.”

When Mr. Masterson returned he found Mr. Smart blurred and incoherent. It was no part of Mr. Masterson’s policy to reduce Mr. Smart to a condition which should alarm the caution of Ogallala, and cause it to relieve his guard. Mr. Smart was the man for the place; to preserve him therein, Mr. Masterson withdrew the demijohn from circulation.

Mr. Smart, even through the happy mists which enveloped him, spoke well of this step. After supper, the demijohn could be recalled. The friendship which Mr. Smart and Mr. Masterson had conceived for one another might then be expanded, and its foundation deepened and secured. Thus sufficiently if not distinctly spake Mr. Smart; and Mr. Masterson coincided with him at every angle of his argument.

It was nine o'clock, and supper had been over two hours when Mr. Masterson again sought Mr. Smart at that gentleman's post in the hall. Mr. Masterson had much to talk about. The more he had seen of Ogallala the better he liked it. As for Mr. Smart, he was among Ogallala's best features. It had become Mr. Masterson's purpose to go into business in Ogallala. Possessing boundless capital, he would engage in every scheme of commerce from a general outfitting store to a corral. Mr. Smart should be with him in these enterprises. While Mr. Masterson dilated, Mr. Smart drank, and the pleasant character of the evening was conceded by both.

At one A. M. Mr. Masterson supported Mr. Smart to his cot in Cimarron's room. The invalid roused himself to say more bad words of both Mr. Smart and Mr. Masterson; for the room being unlighted, he assailed Mr. Masterson ignorantly and in the dark. Mr. Smart no sooner felt the cot beneath him than he fell into deep

sleep, and his snorings shook the casements like a strong wind.

At half after two Mr. Masterson stepped confidently into Cimarron's room. He found Mr. Smart as soundly asleep as a corpse. Mr. Masterson shook Cimarron gently by the shoulder:

"Steady!" he whispered.

"Is that you, Bat?" Cimarron asked, coming at once to an understanding of things.

"How hard are you hit?" asked Mr. Masterson. "Can you walk?"

"I'm too stiff and sore for that."

"Then it's a case of carry."

It was within five minutes of the train. Mr. Masterson wrapped the wounded Cimarron in the bed-clothes; thus disguised he resembled a long roll of gray army blankets.

Being a powerful man, Mr. Masterson tossed Cimarron over his shoulder, and started down the stair. The injured one ground his teeth with the anguish of it, but was as mute as a fox. There was still a drunken voice or two in the barroom of the Midland, but Mr. Masterson—who had looked over the route in the afternoon—eliminated whatever risk existed of meeting anyone by making for a side door.

Once in the dark street, by circuitous paths, Mr. Mas-

terson sought the station. He did not go to the depot proper, but found a place a little distance up the track, where the smoking-car would stop. Also, he took the side opposite to that on which passengers got on and off the train. There he waited in the deep shadow of a line of freight cars, supporting the drooping Cimarron against the nearest car. The two were in time; Mr. Masterson could see the headlight, and hear the scream of the engine.

The express swept in and stopped; by the best of best fortunes the forward platform of the smoking-car paused squarely in front of Mr. Masterson and Cimarron. Cautiously Mr. Masterson picked up his charge and placed him upon the topmost step. Then he swung himself aboard and made ready to drag Cimarron inside. The latter met the situation in a manner excessively limp and compliant; for all his iron nerve, he had fainted.

As Mr. Masterson bent over Cimarron, some unauthorized person came from out the darkness.

“Whom have you got there?”

As the one in search of knowledge hove in reach, Mr. Masterson smote him upon the head with his heavy eight-inch pistol. The inquiring one went over backward, and Mr. Masterson was pleased to see that he fell free of the wheels. Yes, it was right; the unknown had sinned the sin of an untimely curiosity.

The engine whistled, the train moved, and Mr. Masterson packed the unconscious Cimarron into the car and placed him in the nearest seat. There were half a dozen passengers scattered about; all were soundly slumbering. Mr. Masterson drew a breath of relief, and wiped his face; for the night was an August night and the work had been hot. Then he rearranged Cimarron's blankets, and threw a cupful of water in his face by way of restorative. That, and the breeze through the lifted window, caused Cimarron to open his eyes.

"Give me some whiskey."

Mr. Masterson looked conscience-stricken.

"I forgot the whiskey!"

"Forgot the whiskey!" repeated Cimarron, in feeble scorn. "What kind of a rescue party do you call this? I'd sooner have stayed where I was! Besides, I had it laid out how I'd finish shootin' up that Jenkins party the moment I could totter over to the Sheaf of Wheat."

Mr. Masterson, to whom the petulance of the sick was as nothing, vouchsafed no return, and Cimarron sank back exhausted.

When the conductor appeared, the wary Mr. Masterson met that functionary in the car door.

"Got any children?" asked Mr. Masterson.

"Five," said the conductor, whom it is superfluous to say was a married man; "five; an' another in the shops."

"The reason I ask," observed Mr. Masterson, "is that my brother over there has measles, and I wouldn't want you to go packing it back to your babies. I have to wrap him up to keep him from catching cold. The doctor said that if he ever caught cold once we'd have some fun."

While Mr. Masterson was exploring Ogallala and perfecting his scheme of rescue, he had purchased tickets to Grand Island. He bought tickets to Grand Island because he intended to get off at North Platte; the ticket-buying was a ruse and meant to break the trail. The conductor, as he received Mr. Masterson's tickets, thanked him for his forethought in defending his children from the afflicted brother.

"I'm a father myself," said Mr. Masterson, who in amplification of any strategy was ever ready to round off one mendacity with another.

The dawn was showing when the train drew in at North Platte. Shouldering the helpless Cimarron, Mr. Masterson stepped onto the deserted station platform. Cimarron gave a querulous groan.

"Where be you p'intin' out for now?" he demanded. "I'm gettin' a heap tired of this rescue. It's too long, an' besides it's too toomultuous."

"Tired or no," responded Mr. Masterson, steadily, "you're going to be rescued just the same."

The Cochino Colorow was a gentleman whose true name was Mr. Cooper. He had been rebaptised as the "Cochino Colorow," which means the "Red Hog," by the Mexicans and the Apaches when he was a scout for General Crook, and about the time the latter gained from the same sources his own title of the "Gray Fox."

Mr. Cooper was not heralded as the Cochino Colorow because of any aggressive gluttonies; but he was round and with a deal of jowl, and suffered from a nose that, colour and contour, looked like the ace of hearts. Besides, Mr. Cooper had red hair. These considerations induced the Mexicans and Apaches to arise as one man and call him the Cochino Colorow; and the name stuck.

Mr. Masterson and the Cochino Colorow had been fellow scouts under the wise Ben Clark when the latter guided the Black Kettle wanderings of General Custer. Since then the Cochino Colorow had adopted more peaceful pursuits as proprietor of the Bank Exchange in North Platte, and on the morning when Mr. Masterson, with Cimarron over his shoulder like a sack of oats, came seeking him, he was a familiar as well as a foremost figure of that commonwealth.

The Bank Exchange was almost empty of customers when Mr. Masterson and his burden arrived; a few all-night souls were still sleepily about a faro table, and the Cochino Colorow himself was behind the box.

"Hello, Bat!" exclaimed the Cochino Colorow, manifestly surprised, and turning the box on its side to show a recess in the deal. "Where in the name of Santa Ana do you come from? What's that you're totin'?"

"I'm totin' a friend," replied Mr. Masterson.

The Cochino Colorow hastily assigned a talented person who was keeping the case, to deal the interrupted game, while he in person waited upon the wants of the fugitives. Mr. Masterson told the story of their adventures to the Cochino Colorow.

"And for all my walking in the water about those tickets," concluded Mr. Masterson, "I'm afraid the Ogallala outfit will cross up with us before ever I can freight Cimarron into Dodge. The moment that drunkard Smart comes to, or the rest of 'em find they're shy Cimarron, they'll just about take to lashing and back-lashing the situation with the telegraph, and I figure they'll cut our trail."

"Which if they should," confidently returned the Cochino Colorow, "we'll stand 'em off all right. Between us, I'm the whole check-rack in North Platte."

Mr. Masterson's fears were justified. As early as the afternoon of the same day, Mr. Sopris and a companion, whom Mr. Masterson, because of the handkerchief which bound his brows, suspected to be the inquisitive one, walked into the Bank Exchange. Mr. Masterson and the

Cochino Colorow had remarked their approach from a window while they were yet two blocks away.

"Is either of 'em that Jenkins crim'nal?" asked the Cochino Colorow.

"No," said Mr. Masterson.

"I'm shore sorry," replied the Cochino Colorow. "If one of 'em now was that Jenkins crim'nal, we'd nacherally prop pore Cimarron up by this yere window, an' let him have a crack at him with my Winchester."

The Cochino Colorow suggested that Mr. Masterson retire to the room where lay the invalid Cimarron. He said that he could best treat with the visitors alone.

Cimarron was tossing to and fro on a couch in a cubby-hole of an apartment immediately to the rear of the Bank Exchange bar. Since the intervening partition was of pine boards, an inch for thickness, what passed between the Cochino Colorow and the invaders fell plainly upon the listening ears of Mr. Masterson and Cimarron.

The visitors laid bare their mission. They set forth the escape of Cimarron; and while they would not pretend that Ogallala hungered to destroy that individual, they did urge a loss to the Ogallala honour if he were permitted to walk off in a manner of open, careless insolence.

"It ain't what this Cimarron does," explained Mr.

Sopris; "it ain't that he's done more'n shoot away three of Jenks' fingers, an' as they was on the left hand, they may well be spared. What Ogallala objects to is the manner of this person's escape. It not only puts Mr. Smart in the hole, speshul, but it reflects on Ogallala for hoss sense."

"Well, gents," returned the Cochino Colorow with cool nonchalance, "you can't expect me to bother myse'f to death about what comes off in Ogallala. Which, speakin' general, I'm that numbed by my own misfortunes, I don't care much what happens, so it don't happen to me."

"It wasn't," retorted Mr. Sopris, "that we allowed you'd feel a heap concerned, but we got a p'inter that you're harborin' these yere felons personal."

"Is that so?" observed the Cochino Colorow, assuming airs of chill dignity. "Gents, since you impugns my integrity, my only word is, 'Make your next move.'"

"Our next move," observed Mr. Sopris, "will be to go squanderin' about into the uttermost corners of this yere deadfall, an' search out our game."

"Shore!" exclaimed the Cochino Colorow, picking up a rifle that stood in the corner. "An' bein' plumb timid that a-way, of course I'll neither bat an eye nor wag a year ag'in the outrage."

The Cochino Colorow cocked the Winchester. Mr.

Sopris shook his head, as might one whose good nature had been abused.

“That’s plenty!” said Mr. Sopris. “Since sech is your attitooode of voylence, we jest won’t search this joint.”

“No, I don’t reckon none you will,” retorted the Cochino Colorow, fingering the Winchester. “You two delegates from Ogallala had better hit the trail for home. An’ don’t you never come pirootin’ into North Platte searchin’ for things no more.”

Mr. Masterson and Cimarron overheard this conversation, and the dialogue so affected the latter that Mr. Masterson had his work cut out to keep him in his blankets. As the colloquy ended and the retreating foot-falls told the departure of the committee from Ogallala, Cimarron, sore, sick and exhausted, turned his face to the wall with a sigh of shame.

“Bat,” he said, pleadingly, “would you mind leavin’ the room a moment while I blush?” Then he continued while his tears flowed: “We’re a fine pair of centipedes to lie bunched up in yere while the Red Hog plays our hands!”

“They were only four-flushing,” said Mr. Masterson, soothingly, by way of consolation.

In the corral to the rear of the Bank Exchange stood a ramshackle phaeton, which was one of the sights that

North Platte showed to tourists. This conveyance belonged to the mother-in-law of the Cochino Colorow. The lady in question, who was of a precise, inveterate temper, was in the East visiting relatives, and the Cochino Colorow, after sundry drinks to convey his courage to the needed height, endowed Mr. Masterson and Cimarron with the phaeton to assist them in a cross-country break for Dodge. After this generous act the Cochino Colorow was troubled in spirit.

"I'll fight Injuns for fun," explained the Cochino Colorow, defensively to Mr. Masterson, "but whether you deems me weak or not, I simply shudders when I think of my said mother-in-law an' what she'll say about that buggy. But what could we-all do? Cimarron has got to *vamos*. Them Ogallala sharps will most likely be showin' up to-morry with a warrant an' a comp'ny of milishy, an' that vehicle is the one avenoo of escape. While her language will be mighty intemperate, still, in the cause of friendship, a gent must even face his mother-in-law."

"What do you reckon she'll do?" asked Mr. Masterson, who was not a little disturbed by the evident peril of the good Cochino Colorow. "Mebby Cimarron had better give himself up."

"No," replied the desperate one. "It shall never be said that anything, not even a well-grounded fear of

that esteemable lady whom I honour under the endearin' name of mother-in-law, could keep me from rushin' with her phaeton to the rescue of a friend beset."

The Cochino Colorow roped and brought up a mud-hued, ewe-necked, hammer-headed beast of burden, and said its name was Julius Cæsar. This animal, which had a genius for bolting one moment and backing up the next, he hooked to the phaeton. Cimarron, whose helplessness was not of the hands, could hold the reins and guide Julius Cæsar. Mr. Masterson would ride a pinto pony furnished by the generous partisanship of the Cochino Colorow. It would take a week to make Dodge, and a week's provisions, solid and liquid, were loaded into the phaeton.

The faithful Cochino Colorow rode with them on a favourite sorrel as far as Antelope Springs. Arriving at that water, he bade the travellers farewell.

"Good luck to you," cried the Cochino Colorow, waving a fraternal hand. "Give my regyards to Wright an' Kell an' Short."

"I hope you won't have trouble with that outfit from Ogallala," returned Mr. Masterson.

The Cochino Colorow snapped his fingers.

"Since my mind's took to runnin' on my mother-in-law," he said, "I've done quit worryin' about sech jim-crow propositions."

And thus they parted.

It was a week later when Mr. Masterson and the rescued one made Dodge. When he had seen the suffering Cimarron safely in bed at the Wright House, Mr. Masterson began looking after his own welfare at the Long Branch.

"You cert'nly had a strenuous time, Bat," observed Mr. Short, sympathetically.

"Strenuous!" repeated Mr. Masterson. "I should say as much! Cimarron was as ugly as a sore-head dog, and wanted everything he could think of from a sandwich to a six-shooter. I was never so worn to a frazzle. It was certainly," concluded Mr. Masterson, replenishing his glass, "the most arduous rescue in which I ever took a hand; and we'd have never pulled it off if it hadn't been for the Cochino Colorow. Here's hoping he can square himself with that relative he robbed. She's as sour as pig-nuts, and I don't feel altogether easy about the Cochino Colorow. However, if the lady puts up too rough a deal, I told him he'd find a ready-made asylum here."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WORRIES OF MR. HOLIDAY.

IT was growing dark in California Gulch. Red Jack, the barkeeper of the Four Flush saloon, began to light up one by one the kerosene lamps, so that the Four Flush might be made resplendent against the advent of its evening customers. Just then the customers were at flap-jacks and bacon, for it was supper time in California Gulch. Having rendered the Four Flush a blaze of expectant glory, Red Jack took a rag and mopped the bar, already painfully clean. Then he shifted the two six-shooters, which were part of the concealed furniture of the bar, so that vagrant drops from careless glasses might not bespatter them.

Commonly, Red Jack consoled himself by whistling the "Mocking Bird" at this hour, when the stones of the Four Flush were grinding low. On this particular evening he was mute. Also his glance, when now and then he cast it upon Mr. Masterson and Mr. Holiday, who

were engaged in whispered converse over a monte table just across the room, showed full of decorous interest.

Not that Red Jack objected to Mr. Masterson and Mr. Holiday holding a conference on the premises. It was plain by the respectful softness of his eye that he dwelt in sympathy therewith, and was only restrained from making a third for the pow-wow by an experience which taught him never to volunteer advice or put a question. Patronage and curiosity are crimes in the West, and ones sophisticated will not risk their commissions.

However, Red Jack might, without violating the canons of his tribe and region, relieve himself with one act of amiable politeness. While he could not have a share in the talk between Mr. Masterson and Mr. Holiday, wanting an invitation to join them therein, he was free to provide the inspiration. Wherefore Red Jack brought a bottle and two glasses, and set them between Mr. Masterson and Mr. Holiday. Having thus made himself one with them in spirit, Red Jack left the pair to themselves, and made the rounds of the lamps to turn down ones which in a primary exuberance had begun to smoke.

"It's tough lines, Bat," said Mr. Holiday, as he poured himself a drink. "I've never done anything

worse than down a man, always a warrior at that, and now to have to rustle a party, even when it isn't on the level, comes plenty hard."

"But it's the one thing to do, Doc," returned Mr. Masterson. Mr. Holiday had been a dentist in his native Georgia, and his intimates called him Doc. "It's the only trail," reiterated Mr. Masterson. "The message says that they start to-day from Tucson. They'll be in Denver day after to-morrow. The only way to beat them is to have you under arrest. Our Governor won't give up a man to Arizona who's wanted here at home. Those reward-hungry sports from Tucson will get turned down, and meanwhile you will be on bail. That Arizona outfit can never take you away while a charge is pending against you in Colorado. You'll be safe for life."

"That wouldn't be for long," returned Mr. Holiday, "at the rate my lungs are losing."

Mr. Holiday was in the grasp of consumption, as one might tell by the sunken chest and hollow eye, even without the cough which was never long in coming. It was this malady of the lungs which had brought him West in the beginning.

"On the whole," objected Mr. Holiday, following a moment of thought, "why not go back to Arizona and be tried? It's four to one they couldn't convict; and

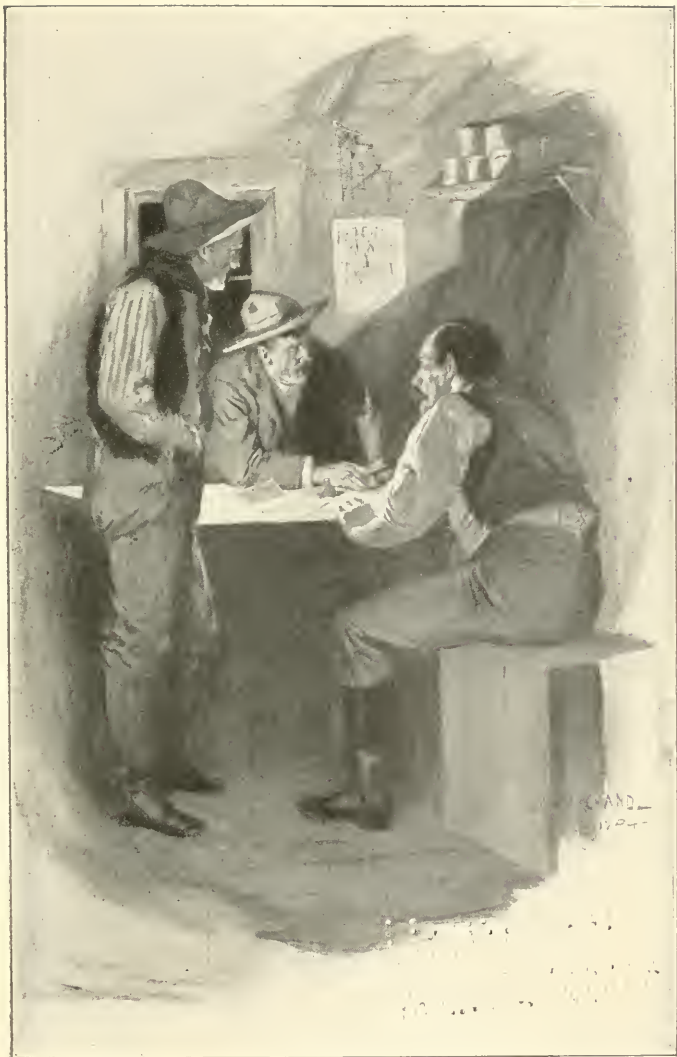
I've gone against worse odds than that every day since I was born."

"Man!" expostulated Mr. Masterson, "it would never come to trial. You wouldn't get as far as Albuquerque. Some of the band would board the train and shoot you in the car-seat—kill you, as one might say, on the nest! It isn't as though you were to have a square deal. They'd get you on the train: get you with your guns off, too, for you'd be under arrest. Doc, you wouldn't last as long as a pint of whiskey at a barn-raising."

Mr. Masterson spoke with earnestness. His brow was wise and wide, his cool eye the home of counsel. It was these traits of a cautious intelligence that had given him station among his fellows as much as any wizard accuracy which belonged with his six-shooters.

"What is your plan, then?" said Mr. Holiday.

"You see the Off Wheeler over yonder?" Mr. Masterson pointed to a drunken innocent who was sunk in slumber in a far corner of the saloon. The Off Wheeler having no supper to eat, was taking it out in sleep. "You go to the edge of the camp," continued Mr. Masterson. "When you've had time to place yourself, I'll wake up the Off Wheeler and tell him to take my watch to the Belle Union. You stand him up and get it. Then I'll have him before the alcalde to swear out a warrant. You see, it will be on the square as far as the Off Wheeler



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is concerned. At the same time, because we don't mean it, it won't be robbery; you can console yourself with that. It'll be a bar to those reward hunters from Tucson, however, with their infernal requisition papers. They ought to be called assassination, not requisition, papers, for that is what it would come to if they took you from here. Now, do as I tell you, Doc; your friends will understand."

Mr. Holiday pulled his sombrero over his forehead and went out. Ten minutes later Mr. Masterson aroused the Off Wheeler by the genial expedient of holding a glass of whiskey beneath his sleeping nose. The Off Wheeler, under this treatment, revived, with all his feeble faculties, and drank the same. Then he turned a vacant look on Mr. Masterson.

"Take my watch to the Belle Union," observed Mr. Masterson, giving the Off Wheeler the timepiece. "Give it to Dick Darnell and tell him to take care of it. I'm going to play poker to-night, and if I keep it with me it'll work its way into a jack-pot and get lost. I go crazy when I'm playing poker, and will bet the clothes off my back."

The Off Wheeler was pleased with this speech; the more since it smacked of a friendly confidence on the part of Mr. Masterson. To be on even terms with the most eminent personage in camp flattered the Off

Wheeler. He departed on Mr. Masterson's errand, Mr. Masterson having first enlivened his heels with a five-dollar bill.

In twenty minutes the Off Wheeler was back in the Four Flush, and as well as he might for the chattering terrors of his teeth telling Mr. Masterson how Mr. Holiday had held him up at the street corner with one hand, and confiscated the watch with the other.

"He didn't even pull a gun!" wailed the Off Wheeler. "I wouldn't feel it so much if he had. But to be stood up, an' no gun-play, makes it look like he was tryin' to insult me."

"All right," returned Mr. Masterson, preserving a grave face, "you get a drink, and then we'll have out a warrant for that bandit's arrest. We'll show him that he can't go through the quietest gent in California Gulch and get away unpunished."

"You don't reckon now," observed the Off Wheeler faintly, "that Mr. Holiday would turn in an' blow the top off my head, if I swore ag'inst him, do you?"

"I'll attend to that," said Mr. Masterson; "I'll see that he doesn't harm you."

Then the Off Wheeler was brave and comforted; for who did not know the word of Mr. Masterson?

"It's all right, judge," said Mr. Masterson.

The magistrate, with his sleeves rolled up from a hard

day's work in his shaft, had been brought from supper to make out the affidavit. When he understood for whom it was designed he hesitated in a mystified way.

"It's all right," repeated Mr. Masterson. "Let the Off Wheeler swear to the papers; I'll take the responsibility. And, by the way, you might better authorise me to execute the warrant."

Thus it befell that Mr. Holiday was presently brought in by Mr. Masterson on a charge of robbing, with force and arms, one Charles Stackhouse alias the Off Wheeler. The bail was fixed, and half the men in California Gulch went on the bond. When these technicalities were complied with, Mr. Masterson, glancing at the very watch of which the Off Wheeler had been depleted, said:

"Doc, it's eight o'clock. We've got to get back to the Four Flush. You know we're to have a game there at eight-thirty."

Mr. Holiday, six years before, had left Georgia for the West. He brought with him a six-shooter, a dentist's diploma, a knowledge of cards, and a hacking cough. When story-tellers mean to kill a character off without giving him a chance, they confer upon him a hacking cough. It was true, however, in the case of Mr. Holiday; a hacking cough he had, and whenever it seized

him it was as though one smote against his breastbone with the bit of an axe.

In the West Mr. Holiday's diploma would do him little good. There lives no more of Western call for a dentist than for one who paints flowers upon silks. Wherefore, and because Mr. Holiday must dine and drink until he died of that consumption, he took to cards.

Now, cards make up a commerce wherein the West confesses an interest. Mr. Holiday became a busy man, and encountered fortune, black and white; but he never complained until one Dallas evening, when a gentleman said that he held six cards. The game was draw poker, and a hand consisting of six cards would have been an inexcusable vulgarity.

There was no long-drawn discussion. The gentleman who had mentioned the six cards cut off debate with a Colt's pistol. Mr. Holiday met the situation half way, and Dallas buried a foremost citizen.

Dallas blamed no one.

"They broke even as to guns," said Dallas, "and Joe lost."

From Dallas Mr. Holiday travelled into the Panhandle. Perhaps his broken health made him irritable, or possibly he was over-sensitive. Whatever the argument, when a rude spirit, a rider for the Frying Pan ranch, whom he met in Tascosa, spoke of Mr. Holiday as one

who ought to have been clerking in a store, he promptly hived him with a bullet through his heart. This was when Mr. Willingham flourished as Sheriff for the Panhandle; but as that officer was over towards Goodnight's at the time, no fault should attach to him. Panhandle sentiment, as had that of Dallas, justified Mr. Holiday; his critic had his guns on when he perished, and that is, or should be, sufficient wherever justice holds the scales.

From the Panhandle Mr. Holiday migrated to Denver. No one packs a gun in Denver, at least no gun big enough to win the respect of Mr. Holiday. Yielding to the jealousy of Denver touching pistols, our dying one from Georgia put his irons aside. He felt lonesome without them, a feeling that grew into disgust when a rough, having advantage of his weak condition, heaped contumely on his head, Mr. Holiday sighed as he drew a knife—it was carried somewhere between his shoulders—and altered the appearance of the insolent one to such a degree that he was as a stranger to his friends.

It was six months later when Mr. Holiday next claimed attention by listlessly emptying his pistol into the head of a gentleman who had laid unlawful claim to a stack of his chips. They were reposing, copped, in what faro gamblers term the Big Square.

This homicide, which occurred in Las Vegas, also

found popular endorsement. The illicit action of departed had placed him beyond the pale. There is no love in the West for rash or wicked ones who illegally covet their neighbour's chips. The episode bore somewhat upon Mr. Holiday, however, who had an imagination edged by books. He was heard to mourn a trifle.

"I don't see what's the matter with my luck," said Mr. Holiday, as he arranged with an undertaker on the Plaza for the obsequies. Mr. Holiday was too well bred to leave a burden upon the community, and even his enemies admitted that he never failed to make a proper clean-up and always buried his dead. "I don't see what's the matter with my luck," repeated Mr. Holiday, "but it looks as though I had more of this sort of thing sawed off on me than any invalid in the Territory."

"That's what!" replied the undertaker, sympathetically. His sympathy in no wise dimmed the brilliancy of his bill, which document did him proud.

Following that Las Vegas difference, Mr. Holiday withdrew to Tombstone. It is best for a gentleman, when he has filled a grave with one other than himself, to seek new theatres of effort. In Tombstone, foremost in the social and business swirl of the camp, Mr. Holiday became acquainted with the brothers Earp. Said brothers, being respectively Virgil, Wyatt and Morgan, were all splendid shots and sterling folk of

standing, character and force. The brothers Earp and Mr. Holiday became friends at sight. It was as though a fourth had been born into the Earp family.

The East, supercilious and white of shirt, should avoid a narrow view of Western men and manners. The East should not measure up the West by Eastern standards. While the West pays its faithful interest, and does not borrow more than one-fifth of the security, the East should rest content. The one is a banker, the other a warrior; one employs interest, the other uses a gun; both kill.

Virgil Earp was marshal of Tombstone. It was a post not wanting in vicissitudes, and Virgil Earp's arm had been crippled and made as naught by a shotgun in the hands of an illwisher. But it was his left arm; his right, with the hand that appertained, was all that one might ask. What more should a Western marshal require than a perfect pistol hand and eye to match?

Wyatt and Morgan Earp were in the service of the Express Company. They went often as guards—"riding shotgun," it was called—when the stage bore unusual treasure.

Over in the San Simon Valley lived a covey of cattle people, with Curly Bill at its head. The cow business is a lazy trade. It leaves plenty of idle time in the hands of ones who follow it. Those of the San Simon were

by nature bubbling springs of industry. Since the cattle trade did not employ their whole energy, they oft repaired to a nearby trail and stopped the Tombstone stage.

There came an occasion when Curly Bill could not go with the expedition, and that was unfortunate. He was obliged to entrust the enterprise to subordinates, who bungled the affair. They shot the stage driver when they should have shot a wheeler. The reins fell from the driver's dead hands; the fear-maddened team ran away and carried one hundred thousand dollars in gold from beneath the larcenous palms of the hold-ups. In their wrath the road agents sent a volley after the rocking, reeling, disappearing coach. It snuffed out a tourist who was riding outside.

Four days went by, and a quartette of the San Simon people, being the McLowrie brothers, Frank and John, and the Clanton brothers, Billy and Ike, came into Tombstone to spy out how much was known or guessed of those desperately poor workmen who had so let the stage job fall through. The investigators discovered that more was known than stood best for their health. They lost no time in deciding to ride back to the San Simon.

Virgil Earp had made a different plan. The San Simon, as a region, would not suffer in its respectability were it never again to see a Clanton or a McLowrie.

With a purpose to detain the San Simon delegation, Virgil Earp assembled his kinsmen, Wyatt and Morgan. To be polite, Virgil invited Mr. Holiday, then but a week in Tombstone, to have his smoky part in the coming war. He might act with the Earp household in that proposed round-up of the road agents.

Virgil Earp did this in a spirit of politeness. It is Western manners when you have a fight to make—one that is commodious and in which there is room for their honourable accommodation—to invite your friends. This you may do to a point that brings your party even with the enemy. You must not, however, overtop the foe in numbers. That would be the worst of form, and fix you as coarse and low and ignorant in ever refined mind. With only a trio of the Earps, there existed in the pending engagement a reputable vacancy, and Virgil asked Mr. Holiday to fill it. Mr. Holiday accepted. To decline such a courtesy would want a precedent and destroy one's good repute. Such action on Mr. Holiday's part would have shocked the Tombstone taste, which is as silken as a spaniel's ear.

The brothers Earp and Mr. Holiday met the San Simon outfit as the latter, mounted for the long ride, came spurring forth of the corral. There was no time frittered in speech. The San Simon contingent jumped

from their saddles, each using his horse as a breast-work. The brothers Earp and Mr. Holiday had no horses to cover them. A horse makes a good breast-work, but a bad gun-rest.

The gods fought on the side of the law, the stage company, the brothers Earp, and Mr. Holiday. There was a rattle of six-shooters. Two McLowries and one Clanton fell with bullets where their thoughts should be. The smoke lifted, and there stood Ike Clanton begging his life.

"Run for it, then, you coyote!" cried Wyatt Earp, and the suppliant heaved himself into the saddle and sped with the flying wind.

"That was a mistake, Wyatt," quoth Mr. Holiday; "you should have collected his hair." Mr. Holiday was far of sight; before a week went by events arose to justify his comment.

After the battle the brothers Earp and Mr. Holiday repaired to the nearest saloon and refreshed themselves. Then the stage company's surgeon came and stopped up the bullet holes, whereof the four owned seven among them. Tombstone meanwhile issued forth in a body and joyfully planted the dead.

Six days later, having advantage of the darkness, Ike Clanton, with Mr. Spence, Mr. Stillwell, and one Florentine, a Mexican, crept to the rear window of the

Eureka saloon, and shot dead Morgan Earp, engaged at seven-up.

Virgil and Wyatt placed the body of the dead Morgan in a coffin and, with Mr. Holiday to be of the mourners, carried it to Colton. At Colton the body would take the train for California, the home of the Earps. Virgil would go as company for the dead.

Wyatt Earp and Mr. Holiday rode as far as Tucson. They would have gone to California with the dead Morgan, but they did not have the time. It was now their duty to get the scalps of the San Simon four who had worked the destruction of Morgan. Also, to save their reputations and secure their prey, they must move at once before the trail grew cold.

Fortune and luck were theirs. As the train, bearing the dead Morgan, drew into Tucson, the hawk-like gray eyes of Mr. Holiday showed him Messrs. Stillwell and Clanton on the station platform. He pointed out the red-hand ones to Wyatt Earp.

The two swung from the train.

The quarry separated, Mr. Clanton running craftily in and out among the crowd, while Mr. Stillwell, with an utter dearth of war-wisdom, fled along the lonely track. Wyatt and Mr. Holiday pursued Mr. Stillwell, and brought him to bay near the water tank. Filling

him full of lead, they returned, and rapped on the car-window to attract the attention of Virgil.

“One!” cried Wyatt, holding up a finger.

Virgil looked up; the funeral sadness of his face for a moment gave way to a smile. He nodded, and then the train pulled out.

That night Wyatt Earp and Mr. Holiday turned Tucson upside down hunting for the evanescent Mr. Clanton. He had fled and left no sign.

“I must sleep, Wyatt,” said Mr. Holiday, at last.

One is not to forget that Mr. Holiday was an invalid, with days not only numbered, but few. His fatigue was excusable. That he was wearied to a standstill his yellow moustache, a-tremble with the nervous twitching of his lip, made proof.

Speaking of Mr. Holiday’s moustache—the colour of corn: Is it not the thing strange how those gentlemen of guns and perils should have been every one of the gray-eyed strain? Or was it that the desperate drop in the veins of each came from some old forgotten viking ancestor of that yellow-haired, battle-axe breed which once foraged and fought along the coasts of Northern Europe?

Mr. Holiday was vastly repaired by a long night’s sleep. The morning found Mr. Holiday and Wyatt Earp in the saddle, their belts heavy with cartridges,

war-bags bulging with provant. They rode out of Tucson, and their desperate campaign of revenge commenced. They invaded the San Simon and blotted out the Mexican Florentine. This was slight work, like the killing of a jack-rabbit. There should be braver game in the San Simon.

The San Simon ranks, however, were growing thin. Mr. Spence, fear-winged, had fled into Mexico. The surviving Mr. Clanton had made good his flight begun that Tucson evening, and was never traced.

Curly Bill, the San Simon chief, owned a better courage, and Wyatt Earp and Mr. Holiday found him at the Whetstone Springs. There was a battle royal; Wyatt Earp and Mr. Holiday on the one side, with Curly Bill and a couple of his adherents on the other. Curly Bill was rubbed out, while Wyatt Earp, shaving eternity, had the cantle of his saddle torn away with a double handful of buckshot. The two adherents of Curly Bill, while somewhat shattered, escaped.

"With Pete Spence in Mexico," said Wyatt Earp to Mr. Holiday, as he changed his shattered saddle for the saddle of Curly Bill, "and Ike Clanton nowhere to be found, I take it we might as well quit and call it a day."

"There's nothing else," said Mr. Holiday.

Mr. Holiday and Wyatt Earp rode back to Tombstone. They were in their rooms when a word of

warning reached them. That recent blazing work in Tucson and in the San Simon had invoked the invidious admiration of a Sheriff who was lusting for fame. He was even then below with a posse brought from afar, equipped of warrants and weapons and ready to apprehend them.

“What do you say, Doc?” asked Wyatt Earp.

“For myself,” said Mr. Holiday, smothering a cough, “I think I shall shoot my way out. Considering the state of my lungs, it would endanger my health to be locked up.”

They sent down quiet word, and had their horses saddled and brought around. Then Mr. Holiday and Wyatt Earp walked into the centre of that aspiring posse. There was a giving way; no one stretched his hand to stay their going. Only the ambitious Sheriff spoke.

“Mr. Earp,” said he, sweetly, “I want to see you.”

“My friend,” said Wyatt Earp, turning on the other a glance of warning, “you may see me once too often.”

Mr. Holiday and Wyatt Earp, at a road-gait, took the trail for Tucson. In the blistering heat and whiteness of the summer dust, they disappeared; that was the last of their story in Tombstone. They didn't see Tucson; at a fork in the trail they halted.

“Well, *adios*, Doc,” said Wyatt Earp, extending his

hand. "Write me in 'Frisco how the world goes with you."

"I will," returned Mr. Holiday. "I shall try Colorado. I must consider my health, and I prefer the climate there. *Adios!*"

It was a year later when the Arizona Sheriff, who stood aside that Tombstone day, broke into California Gulch, and the wisdom of Mr. Masterson became for Mr. Holiday a shield of thickness.

"Your papers," observed the Governor to him of Arizona, "are in proper form, and set clearly forth the death of one Stillwell at the hands of Mr. Holiday. But Mr. Holiday is under charges here for robbery on the highway. You cannot expect me to cheat justice of its due in Colorado, in order to send you a man whom you should never have let escape. The requisition must be refused."

Mr. Holiday lived on in California Gulch, sheltered by the charge of the Off Wheeler. It protected him to the end, which was not far away. When his sands were running low, Mr. Masterson was by his couch.

"You must have used up a ton of lead, Doc," observed Mr. Masterson one afternoon, being in a mood of fine philosophy; "and, considering your years in the West, it beats the marvellous. It would look as though you

simply shot your way out of one battle into another. How did you come to do it?"

"It used to worry me," gasped Mr. Holiday, "to think that I must die, and, to take my mind off my troubles, I mixed up with everything that came along. It was the only way in which I could forget myself."

California Gulch was present at the funeral. They buried Mr. Holiday beneath a clump of cedars high up on the mountain side, and Red Jack draped the Four Flush bar in mourning.

"We're going to miss him," he remarked, with a lugubrious sigh, to Mr. Masterson, when, after the services, the latter came in for his evening drink. "We'll sorely miss him from our midst! An' when I think on his c'reer, sort o' run over it hittin' the lofty places, I'm here to observe that he was the vividest invalid, an' the busiest, with which I ever crossed up. He certainly was an in-dee-fat-ig-a-ble sick man; an' that goes!"

CHAPTER XV.

HOW MR. HICKOK WENT INTO CHEYENNE.

MR. Masterson had sent for him, and within two days after his arrival Mr. Hickok was established in the best society of Cheyenne. This, when one reflects upon the particular exclusiveness of Cheyenne's first circles, should talk loudly in Mr. Hickok's favor. It was something of which any gentleman might be proud. Not a saloon denied him credit; that hotel which he honoured with his custom was as his home; his word was good for a dozen stacks of blues at any faro table in the camp. And this, mind you, in days when Cheyenne's confidence came forward slowly, and the Cheyenne hand was not outstretched to every paltry individual who got off the stage.

Two weeks prior to these exaltations, Mr. Hickok, then of Kansas City, might have been seen walking in that part of Main Street known as Battle Row. For one

of his optimism, Mr. Hickok's mood showed blue and dull. One could tell this by the brooding eye, and the droop which invested his moustache with a mournfulness not properly its own. Moreover, there was further evidence to prove the low spirits of Mr. Hickok. His hair, long as the hair of a woman, which in lighter moments fell in a blond cataract about his broad shoulders, was knotted away beneath his hat.

The world does not praise long hair in the case of any man. But Mr. Hickok had much in his defence. He had let his hair grow long in years when the transaction of his business hopes and fears gave him much to do with Indians. The American savage possesses theories that yield neither to evidence nor argument. He believes that every paleface who cuts short his hair does so in craven denial of a scalp to what enemy may rise victorious over him. Such cowards he contemns. On the guileless other hand, he holds that the long-haired man is a warrior bold, flaunting defiance with every toss of his mane. That long-haired one may rob and cheat and swindle and cuff and kick your savage; the latter will neither murmur nor lift hand against him. For is not he who robs and cheats and swindles and cuffs and kicks a chief? And is not his flowing hair a franchise so to do? There lurks a dividend in hair for any who traffics with your savage. Wherefore, in an hour of

aboriginal commerce Mr. Hickok encouraged a hirsute luxuriance in the name of trade. Later, he continued it for the sake of habit and old days.

What should it be to prey upon the sensibilities of Mr. Hickok? Kansas City was in that hour a town of mud and dust and hill and hollow that quenched all happiness and drove the male inhabitants to drink. Was it that to bear him down? No; if it were environment, Mr. Hickok would have made his escape to regions where the sun was shining.

Not to run the trail too far, Mr. Hickok was ruminating the loss of his final dollar, which had fled across a faro layout in the Marble Hall. As he strolled dejectedly in Battle Row, he couldn't have told where his next week's board was coming from, not counting his next week's drinks. It was the dismal present, promising a dismal future, which exhaled those mists to take the curl from Mr. Hickok's moustache and teach his hair to hide beneath his hat. Short-haired men may be penniless and still command respect; a long-haired man without a dollar is a creature laughed at.

Having nothing to engage him but his gloom, Mr. Hickok glanced upward and across the street where, over the fourth-story windows, an Odd-Fellows sign was bolted. The sign was painted black upon white. That

“O” which stood as the initial of “Odd,” showed wood colour inside the black.

It was years before when, to please a bevy of tender tourists, and by permission of Mr. Speers, then Chief of Police, Mr. Hickok emptied his six-shooters into the centre of that “O.” It was a finished piece of shooting; the tourists told of it about their clubs when safe in the East again. The “O,” where the original white had been splintered into wood colour by those dozen bullets it had stopped, showed plain as print. Mr. Hickok sighed as he considered his handiwork.

Mr. Hickok did not sigh because of any former accuracy with pistols; but he recalled how on that fine occasion, in contrast to present bankruptcy, he harboured fourteen hundred dollars in his clothes. He had beaten the bank at Old Number Three, and was rich and gay in consequence.

“I think I shoot better when I’ve got a roll.”

Thus murmured Mr. Hickok, as he meditated upon the strangeness of things. Mr. Hickok might have extended his surnise. A man does all things better when he has a roll.

The currents of life had been flowing swiftly for Mr. Hickok. Two years before he was marshal of Hays, and had shot his way into the popular confidence. In an evil hour a trio of soldiers came over from the Fort, led by

one Lanigan, and took drunken umbrage at Mr. Hickok's hair. This rudeness touched Mr. Hickok tenderly, and in checking it he snuffed out those three as gallery Frenchmen snuff candles at ten paces. Since there arose carpers to say that Mr. Hickok went too far in these homicides, he laid down his trust and journeyed to Abilene.

Mr. Hickok was welcomed with spread arms by Abilene. Its marshal had just been gathered home through the efforts of a cowboy with a genius for firearms. Abilene offered the vacant place to Mr. Hickok, and to encourage acceptance, showed him where it hanged the cowboy. Mr. Hickok accepted, drew on the public fisc for the price of five hundred rounds of ammunition, and entered upon his responsibilities.

Mr. Hickok reigned as marshal eight months, and kept Abilene like a church. Then he put a bullet through Mr. Coit, whose pleasure it had been to go upon tri-weekly sprees and leave everything all over the works. Again, as on that day in Hays, there came narrowists to fling reproach upon Mr. Hickok. They said the affair might have been sufficiently managed by wrecking a six-shooter upon Mr. Coit's head; the dead gentleman had yielded to such treatment on former occasions. As it was, the intemperate haste of Mr. Hickok had eliminated one who spent money with both hands. The tak-

ing off of Mr. Coit might conduce to Abilene's peace; it was none the less a blow to Abilene's prosperity. Mr. Hickok, made heartsore by mean strictures, and weary with complaints which found sordid footing in a lust for gain, gave up his marshalship of Abilene, as he had given up the post in Hays, and wandered east in search of whiter fortune.

About the time he shook the Abilene dust from his moccasins, there came to Mr. Hickok's hand a proposal from Mr. Cody to join him in the production of a drama. It was to be a drama descriptive of an Arcadian West—one wherein stages were robbed, maidens rescued, Indians put to death. Mr. Hickok in real life had long been familiar with every fraction of the stage business; the lines he could learn in a night. Mr. Cody was confident that Mr. Hickok would take instant part in that drama without rehearsal. If Mr. Hickok accepted, the financial side was to be coloured to meet his taste. His social life, so Mr. Cody explained, should be one of splendour and Eastern luxury.

Mr. Hickok, pausing only to break himself at farobank, took up the proffer of Mr. Cody. He journeyed to New York, and found that thorough-going scout sojourning at the Brevoort House.

"Where's your trunk?" asked Mr. Cody.

"Haven't any," returned Mr. Hickok, whose trunk

had been left to keep a boarding-house in countenance. "But I've brought my guns." This last, hopefully.

"That's right," observed Mr. Cody, whom nothing was ever known to daunt. "While a gentleman may be without a change of linen, he should never let his wardrobe sink so low as to leave him without a change of guns."

Mr. Hickok was not a permanency in the theatres. His was a serious nature, and there were many matters behind the footlights to irk the soul of him. For one stifling outrage he was allowed nothing lethal wherewith to feed his six-shooters. Blanks by the hundreds he might have; but no bullets.

Now this, in a blind sort of way, told upon Mr. Hickok as something irreligious. A Colt's-45 was not a joke; its mechanism had not been connived in any spirit of facetiousness. It was hardware for life and death; it owned a mission, and to make of it a bauble and a tinsel thing smote upon Mr. Hickok like sacrilege.

And then, to shoot over the heads of folk shook one's faith. It was as though one mocked the heavens! In good truth, Mr. Hickok never did this last. It was his wont to empty his weapons, right and left, at the shrinking legs of Indian-seeming supers. The practice was not lacking in elements of certain excellence. The powder burned the supers, and brought yells which were

genuine from those adjuncts of the theatre. In that way was the public gratified, and the integrity of the stage upheld.

But the supers objected, and refused to go on with Mr. Hickok. They might love the drama, but not to that extent. It was the rock on which they split. Mr. Hickok would not aim high, and the burned ones would take no part in the presentation unless he did. The situation became strained. As a finale, after bitter words had been spoken, Mr. Hickok quit the mimic world and returned to a life that, while it numbered its drawbacks, might make the boast that it was real. It was then he came to Kansas City, there to experience ebbing, flowing nights at farobank, with that final ebb adverted to, which left him dollar-stranded as described.

This chronicle deserted Mr. Hickok in Battle Row, thinking on the strangeness of things. Having sufficiently surveyed his bullet work of another day, as set forth by the Odd Fellows' emblem, Mr. Hickok was about to resume his walk when a telegraph boy rushed p. His rush over, the urchin gazed upon Mr. Hickok with the utmost satisfaction for the space of thirty seconds. Then he took a message from his book.

"Be you Mr. Hickok?"

"Yes, my child," replied Mr. Hickok blandly.

"Mr. Wild Bill Hickok?"

Mr. Hickok frowned; he distasted the ferocious prefix.

It had been granted Mr. Hickok by romanticists with a bent to be fantastic, and was a step in titles the more strange, perhaps, since Mr. Hickok was not baptised "William," but "James." But "Wild Bill" they made it, and "Wild Bill" it remained; albeit in submission to Mr. Hickok's wishes—he once made them plain by shooting a glass of whiskey from the hand of one who had called him "Wild Bill," to that gentleman's disturbance and a loss to him of one drink—he was never so named except behind his back. When folk referred to him, they called him "Wild Bill"; when they addressed him they did so as "Mr. Hickok." Now, when the world and Mr. Hickok understood each other on this touchy point, every sign of friction ceased. The compromise won ready adoption, and everybody was satisfied since everybody went not without his partial way.

Mr. Hickok tore open the message, while the boy admired him to the hilt. The message was a long one, by which Mr. Hickok deduced it to be important. Mr. Hickok was not over-quick with written English; he had been called in the theatres a "slow study." To expedite affairs he went at once to the signature. This was intelligent enough. As a rule, one could give you every word of any eight-page letter he receives by merely glanc-

ing at the signature. That rule will prove particularly true when the signature is a lady's. However, this time the rule failed.

Mr. Hickok, while he knew the name, was driven to wade through the communication before he could come by even a glint of its purport. This he did slowly and painfully, feeling his way from word to word as though fording a strange and turbid stream. At last, when he made it out, Mr. Hickok's face came brightly forth of the shadows like the sun from behind a cloud. Evidently the news was good. Mr. Hickok glanced again at the name. It was the name of Mr. Masterson, whose life he had once saved.

Lest you gather unjustly some red and violent picture of Mr. Hickok, as one to whom the slaughter of his kind was as the air he breathed, it should be shown that he had saved many lives. The record of this truth would gratify Mr. Hickok were he here to read, for he often remembered it in his conversation.

"If I've took life," Mr. Hickok would remark, "I've frequent saved life. Likewise, I've saved a heap more than I've took. A count of noses would show that the world's ahead by me. Foot up the figgers, an' you'll see I've got lives comin' to me right now."

What Mr. Masterson said was this: He had staked out a claim in the Deadwood district; the assay showed

it full of yellow promise. Mr. Hickok was to be a part owner; likewise, he must meet Mr. Masterson in Cheyenne. Incidentally, the latter had notified the American National to cash Mr. Hickok's draft for two hundred dollars, so that poverty, should such have him in its coils—which it did—might not deter him from proceeding to Cheyenne.

Nothing could have better dovetailed with the broken destinies of Mr. Hickok. Within thirty minutes he had drawn for those two hundred dollars. In forty he had sent three messages. The first was to Mr. Masterson, promising an appearance in Cheyenne. The others were of grimer purpose, and went respectively to Abilene and Hays. These latter were meant to clear the honour of Mr. Hickok.

When Mr. Hickok went into the drama there broke out in Hays and Abilene a hubbub of cheap comment. There were folk of bilious fancy and unguarded lip who went saying that Mr. Hickok had fled to the footlights for safety. He had made enemies, as one who goes shooting up and down is prone to do; certain clots and coteries of these made Hays and Abilene their home camps. It was because he feared these foes, and shrunk from the consequences of their feuds, that he called himself an actor, and went shouting and charging and shooting blank cartridges at imitation Indians throughout

an anæmic East! Such childish employment kept Mr. Hickok beyond the range of his enemies, that was the reason of it; and the reason was the reason of a dog. Thus spake Mr. Hickok's detractors; and none arose to deny, because Mr. Hickok's honour was his honour, and the West does business by the aphorism, "Let every man kill his own snakes."

Mr. Hickok had not gone in ignorance of these slanders; he had heard them when as far away from Abilene and Hays as Boston Common. Now he would refute them; he would give all who desired it an opportunity to burn condemnatory powder in his case. He would pass through Hays and Abilene on his slow way to Cheyenne. These hamlets should be notified. Those who objected to Mr. Hickok's past in any of its incidents might come down to the train and set forth their displeasure with their pistols. With this fair thought, Mr. Hickok addressed respectively and as follows the editors of Abilene and Hays:

"I shall go through your prairie dog village Tuesday. I wear my hair long as usual." This last to intimate a scalp unconquered.

The press is a great and peccant engine; and who has public interest more at heart than your editor? Those of Abilene and Hays posted with all diligence the message of Mr. Hickok on their bulletin boards, adding

thereunto the hour of the Hickok train, and then made preparations to give fullest details of the casualties.

Mr. Hickok cleaned and oiled his guns. He looked forward carelessly to Hays and Abilene. Experience had taught him that the odds were that not a warlike soul would interrupt his progress. Humanity talks fifty times where once it shoots, and Mr. Hickok was not ignorant of the race in its verbal ferocities. Indeed, being a philosopher, he explained them.

"A man," observed Mr. Hickok, "nacherally does a heap more shootin' with his mouth than with his gun. An' for two reasons, to wit:" Here Mr. Hickok would raise an impressive trigger finger. "He's a shorer, quicker shot with his mouth; and it costs less for ammunition. A gent can load and fire his mouth off fifty times with a ten-cent drink of lickier, while cartridges, fifty in a box, are a dollar and four bits a box."

Still, some vigorous person, whether at Abilene or Hays, might appear in the path of Mr. Hickok on battle bent. Wherefore, as aforesaid, he oiled and loaded fully his Colt's-45s.

"Because," said Mr. Hickok, "I wouldn't want to be caught four-flushin' if some gent did call my bluff."

It will seem strange that Mr. Hickok stood willing thus to invite hostilities. The wonder of it might be explained. Mr. Hickok was, like most folk who put in

their lives upon the dreary, outstretched deserts of the West, a fatalist. He would live his days; until his time he was safe from halter, knife and gun. Mr. Hickok had all unconsciously become a fashion of white Cheyenne, and based existence on a fearlessness that never wavered, plus an indifference that never cared. He was what he was; he would be what he would be. Men were merest arrows in the air, shot by some sightless archery of nature, one to have a higher and one a lower flight, and each to come clattering back to earth and bury itself in the grave. That was the religious thought of Mr. Hickok, or rather Mr. Hickok's religious instinct, for he never shaped it to an idea nor piled it up in words.

There were scores to greet Mr. Hickok at Hays and Abilene, but none in hostile guise. While the train paused, Mr. Hickok came down from the platform and stood with his back against the car. There he received his friends and searched the throng for enemies. He was careful, but invincible, and his hair floated bravely as for a challenge.

As the bell rang Mr. Hickok backed smilingly but watchfully aboard. He had no notion of exposing himself, and there might be someone about with the required military talent to manage an attack in flank. But the peace of those visits passed unbroken, and Mr. Hickok's

honour was repaired. Mr. Hickok was not above a sedate joy concerning his healed honour, for, though he might not own a creed, he had a pride.

Now that Hays and Abilene had gone astern with the things that had been, Mr. Hickok sat himself down to a contemplation of Cheyenne. This would be his earliest visit. Nor had he in days gone by made the acquaintance of any one who wrote Cheyenne as his home. Mr. Hickok decided on a modest entrance.

“Which if thar’s one thing that’s always made me tired,” observed Mr. Hickok, as he talked the subject over with himself, “it’s a party jumpin’ into camp as though he owned the yearth an’ had come to fence it.”

Mr. Hickok planned an unobtrusive descent upon Cheyenne. He would appear without announcement. He would let Cheyenne uncover his merits one by one and learn his identity only when events should point the day and way. He would claim no privileges beyond the privileges of common men.

Such was the amiable programme of Mr. Hickok, and he arrayed himself to be in harmony therewith. The yellow mane that had flaunted at Hays and Abilene was imprisoned, as in Kansas City, beneath a small-rimmed soft felt hat, to the end that it enkindle rage in no man. Because the brightness of the sun on the parched pampas hurt his eyes, worn as they were with much scanning

of midnight decks, Mr. Hickok donned dark goggles. His coat was black and long—to cover his armament—and almost of pulpit cut. To put a closing touch on a whole that spoke of lamb's-wool peace, Mr. Hickok, limping with a shade of rheumatism, the harvest of many nights on rain-soaked prairies, carried a cane. This latter was a resplendent creature, having been the butt end of a rosewood billiard cue, and was as heavy as a Sioux war club. Thus appeared Mr. Hickok when he made his Cheyenne début; and those who observed him halting up the street held him for some wandering evangelist, present with a purpose to hold services in the first hurdy-gurdy he caught off his foolish guard.

Mr. Masterson was not in Cheyenne when Mr. Hickok arrived. There was word waiting that he had gone to Deadwood, and would not return for a week. Mr. Hickok, upon receiving this news, resolved for recreation.

It was ten of the evening clock, and Mr. Hickok decided to creep about on his billiard-cue, and take a friendly view of Cheyenne. It was well to go abroad, with what decent speed he might, and acquire a high regard for Cheyenne people; it would be a best method of teaching them to entertain a high regard for him.

“But no trouble!” ruminated Mr. Hickok, with a shake of the head. He was, according to his custom, advis-

ing with himself. "No trouble! 'Thar's nothin' in it! Besides, the pitcher that goes often to the well gets busted at last," and Mr. Hickok sighed sagaciously. Then, as one who registers a good resolve: "The next sport who gets a rise out o' me will have to back me into a corner an' prove conclousive that he's out to kill. Then, of course, I'll be obleeged to take my usual measures."

Such were the cogitations of Mr. Hickok, and all on the side of law and order, when he turned into the Gold Room.

"What'll you have, Sport?" asked the barkeeper.

"Licker," said Mr. Hickok.

The barkeeper tossed up glass and bottle in a manner of scorn. He had called Mr. Hickok "Sport," not for compliment, but derision, and because Mr. Hickok looked like an agriculturist who had gone astray.

"Got a potato ranch some'ers?" remarked the barkeeper, and his tones were the tones of sarcasm. "Or mebbly is it hay?"

Mr. Hickok made no reply as he paid the double price which the astute bar man charged him. He knew he was derided and he knew he was robbed; but full of peace he bore it in wordless humility. Musingly, he recalled a gallant past.

"Now if that barkeep," he reflected, "knowed who I

was, he'd simply hit three or four high places and be miles away."

Mr. Hickok inched towards a faro game which was hungering for victims. The faro game was at the far end of the Gold Room. Over and above a handful of silver, Mr. Hickok had two 50-dollar bills, the remaining moiety of those two hundred sent him by Mr. Masterson. Mr. Hickok was a born speculator; in a moment he had been caught in the coils of the game.

While he had but the even hundred dollars, Mr. Hickok was no one to prolong an agony. He bet the half on the "high card." The turn came, "nine-trey;" Mr. Hickok's fifty were swept into the bank. Mr. Hickock wagered the other fifty on the "high card." The turn came, "deuce-eight."

The dealer counted down twenty-five dollars.

"How's that?" asked Mr. Hickok.

"The limit's twenty-five," spake the dealer gruffly, and the gruff lookout hoarsely echoed: "Limit's twenty-five!"

"But you took fifty when I lost."

"Fifty goes if you lose!" retorted the dealer, insolently, and the hoarse lookout with echoing insolence repeated: "It goes if you lose!"

Then did Mr. Hickok rejoice because of a provident rheumatism that furnished him his billiard-cue.

“Biff! bang!”

Mr. Hickok tapped the dealer and then the lookout. They fell from their perches like apples when one shakes November's bough. Having thus cleared a path for the feet of justice, Mr. Hickok reached across to the bank-roll and helped himself to a bundle of money, which, to quote the scandalised barkeeper who beheld the rapine from afar, was, “big enough to choke a cow.” These riches Mr. Hickok pocketed in the name of right.

Having repaired his money wrongs, as that portion of the Cheyenne public then and there present fell upon him, Mr. Hickok resumed his billiard-cue and went to work. Mr. Hickok did heroic deeds. He mowed a swath through the press! A dozen heads suffered! He fought his way to the wall!

“Now everybody fill his hand!” shouted Mr. Hickok, pulling his 8-inch six-shooters.

Mr. Hickok's goggles had fallen to the floor; his loosened locks were flying like a war banner. Altogether, when thus backed against the wall, and behind a brace of Mr. Colt's best pistols, flowing hair, and eyes gray-fire, Mr. Hickok made a striking figure—one to live long in Cheyenne memory! The public stood at gaze. Then some wise man yelled:

“It's Wild Bill!”

There was no dispute as to Mr. Hickok's identity.

The public instantly conceded it, and began going through doors and windows in blocks of five.

Mr. Hickok, deserted, limped slowly towards the door. As he passed the bar, its once supercilious custodian, raised his head above its moist levels, and asked in meekness:

“Mr. Hickok, will you have a drink? It’s on the house.”

It was the next afternoon; the Cheyenne marshal, accompanied by Mr. Bowlby, proprietor of the Gold Room, paid a courtly visit to Mr. Hickok.

The marshal was aggrieved.

“You ought not to come ambuscadin’ into camp that a-way,” he remonstrated, speaking of Mr. Hickok’s bashful entrance into town. “It might have got a passel of Cheyenne people killed. It wan’t right, Mr. Hickok. Only it’s you, I’d say it sort o’ bordered on the treacherous.”

“It ain’t that I’m askin’ it back, Mr. Hickok,” observed Mr. Bowlby, diffidently, “but I want to check up my game. Sech bein’ my motive, would you-all mind informin’ me kindly how big a wad you got outen that drawer?”

“Which I shore couldn’t say,” returned Mr. Hickok, languidly. “I ain’t counted it none as yet.” Then, in a way of friendly generosity: “Mr. Bowlby, I don’t

reckon how I oughter keep all that money; it's too much. I'd feel easier if you'd let me split it with you."

"No 'bjections in the least," replied Mr. Bowlby, politely.

"Which I should say as much!" exclaimed the marshal, in enthusiastic admiration of Mr. Hickok's liberality. "Thar's an offer that's good enough for a dog! An' now, gents," concluded the marshal, linking one arm into that of Mr. Hickok, and with Mr. Bowlby on the other; "let's go down to the Gold Room an' licker."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAST VISIT TO DODGE.

THERE was a County Seat war between the towns of Cimarron and Ingalls, and it was in the final phases of that involvement the historian first hears of Mr. Masterson's brother Jim. Those differences between Cimarron and Ingalls carried interesting features. Not a least of these was the death of Mr. Prather at Mr. Tighlman's positive hands. The latter exact personage was a citizen of Dodge. Being, however, one who resented narrowisms and to whom any "pent up Utica" was as the thing unbearable, Mr. Tighlman permitted himself an interest in that Gray County contention and, since Cimarron was the natural-born enemy of Dodge, sympathized with Ingalls.

This sentiment on Mr. Tighlman's part did not meet with the approbation of Mr. Prather, who was a partisan of Cimarron, and when the former appeared at the special election called to settle the question, Mr. Prather—to employ a childish phrase—fell into a profound pout. Mr. Tighlman's attendance meant nothing be-

yond a desire to humour his curiosity and flatter that interest which possessed him in favour of an Ingalls success. Mr. Prather, however, in his jealousy for Cimarron, construed it differently and pulled his gun.

Being alert and sensitive, and having had his nerves sharpened by perilous experiences, Mr. Tighlman was instantly aware of this hostile demonstration. As corollary, his own gun left its scabbard coincident with that of Mr. Prather, the result being a weakening of the Cimarron cause by the loss of one. There was no criticism of Mr. Tighlman: for the best belief of folk ascribed a first wrong step to the vanished Mr. Prather. The common feeling was summed up by an onlooker who spoke without prejudice. He said:

“Prather reached for his six-shooter, an’ Billy”—meaning Mr. Tighlman—“beat him to it. That’s all thar was to the fuss.”

The county records were in Cimarron, which had been *de facto* the County Seat. Ingalls came forth of the election victor, and many held that the taking off of Mr. Prather in its moral effect had much to do with bringing the triumph about. It may have been this thought that suggested to Ingalls the enlistment of Mr. Tighlman’s services when, following the election and in defiance of that ballot decision then and there obtained, Cimarron scoffed at every mention of surrendering the records.

Those marks of county authority were the property of Ingalls. What cared Cimarron for that? Cimarron snapped thumb and finger beneath the Ingalls nose! It scorned the election and contemned the result! If Ingalls wanted those records, Cimarron, furbishing up its fire-arms, would admire to see it get them.

Florence in the fourteenth century retained the military genius of Sir John Hawkwood to its standards and set him to lead its armies in the field. Sir John, as rental for his valour, was given a princely salary while he lived and a marble tomb when he died, which latter monument is still extant, a Florentine exhibit when tourists turn that way. Impressed by the Italian example, Ingalls upon being met by the belligerent obstinacy of Cimarron retained Mr. Tighlman. Would he get those records? Mr. Tighlman would.

Mr. Tighlman possessed a capacity for strategy. He went after the records on Sunday. He argued that, Sunday being a day of rest, the male inhabitants of Cimarron would one and all be in the saloons. Mr. Tighlman deduced rightly on that point, and his rapine of the records was only discovered by chance. A Cimarronian, journeying from one barroom to another, observed him as he threw the last volume into the waggon and sounded an alarm.

Within two minutes thereafter, Mr. Tighlman was

shot at five hundred times. And yet he got away and took the records with him. His only injury was received when, a shot having killed a dog at his very feet, he fell over the dog and broke his leg. For all that, he dragged himself aboard the waggon and escaped.

Mr. Tighlman covered his retreat with a shotgun. As a bloodless method of engaging the local faculties, he opened right and left with buckshot on the large front windows that fenced the street. There was a prodigious breaking of glass, and the clatter thereof carried Cimarron almost to a stampede. As showing the blind hurry of the inhabitants, Mr. Tighlman said that he saw one gentleman miss his footing and fall, and before he could even think of getting up eight of his fellow townsmen fell on top of him. It was through such stirring scenes that Mr. Tighlman made his exit, and Jim gained mention because he drove the waggon. The foregoing has nothing at all to do with what follows, and is thrown in only because it may serve as an introduction to Jim.

At what might be called the true beginning of this sketch, Mr. Masterson was located in Tucson, nursing an interest in mines. He had been absent from Dodge divers years. In the interim he had made but a single trip to Dodge, and that a flying one. His brother Jim was temporarily in Camp Supply at the time, two hundred miles to the south, and he missed him. This, however, did

not disturb Mr. Masterson, who was in Dodge for the commercial restoration of Mr. Short.

During those years of Mr. Masterson's absence, the hungry tooth of time had left its marks. Mr. Kelly was dead, Mr. Tighlman was in New Mexico, Mr. Trask had drifted to Montana, Cimarron Bill was in Utah, while Mr. Wright was in Topeka, a member of the Legislature. Of those who had been close to Mr. Masterson only Mr. Short remained.

The others—who if not enemies were but unfriends—had had better luck. Mr. Peacock still ran the Dance Hall, while Mr. Webster kept the Alamo as in days of yore, and maintained under the leadership of Mr. Updegraffe a numerous following.

Even in the time of Mr. Masterson there had been soreness between Mr. Webster and Mr. Short. The Long Branch was garnering a harvest beyond any that lent itself to the reaping hook of the Alamo, and this did not sit easily with Mr. Webster. To be sure, Mr. Short's success in its causes was easily understood. His deal boxes, like Cæsar's wife, were above reproach. Folk were never quite sure about the Alamo's. Also the radical temper of Mr. Short despised a limit. One might pile his stake as tall as he pleased, Mr. Short would turn for it. In the words of an admirer:

“He'd let you play 'em higher'n a cat's back!”

This was not the liberal case with Mr. Webster, who failed of the monetary courage of Mr. Short.

In the carelessness of local politics Mr. Webster became Mayor of Dodge, and he at once took advantage of his power and his elevation to exile Mr. Short. With the latter out of town, the Alamo would fatten and the Long Branch fade.

Being exiled, Mr. Short, following a usual course, hunted up Mr. Masterson, and told his wrongs. Ever and always Mr. Short's friend, the latter began a round-up of the clan. The old Scotch Chiefs burned a cross and sent it about; Mr. Masterson sent messages and burned the wires.

From East and West and North and South, the loyal tribesmen dropped grimly into Dodge. There was Cimarron Bill and Wyatt Earp and Doc Holiday and Ben Thompson and Henry Brown and Charlie Bassett and Shotgun Collins and Shoot-your-eye-out Jack and many another stark fighting man. When these had assembled, Mr. Masterson and Mr. Short appeared, and the former took command.

There was no trouble; Mr. Webster turned the colour of ashes, and Mr. Short resumed his place in trade. Mr. Webster did not like Mr. Masterson any better for this work, although the latter, in adjusting affairs, stretched a point and went excessively out of his way to keep Mr.

Webster from being killed. Mr. Masterson said he wasn't worth it. Mr. Short said he was; but yielded the point in compliment to Mr. Masterson.

When Mr. Short had been restored to the commercial niche that of right was his, Mr. Masterson shook the dust of Dodge from his moccasins, as he imagined for the final time. Nor was he sorry. His friends were gone; and the Dodge he had known and loved and defended had passed away.

In the wake of Mr. Masterson's departure, Mr. Webster saw, in the hard, gray glance of Mr. Short, that which alarmed his blood. Being wise in a way, he nodded prudently to one who, upon the hint, proffered a romantic figure, and bought out Mr. Short. The latter went to Texas, while Mr. Webster again began to sleep o' night. With the going of Mr. Short, Jim, for any on whom he might rely, was left alone in Dodge.

That was the situation when one Tucson evening in the Oriental, Mr. Masterson was handed a telegram. He had been hearing evil news all day about his mines, and thinking this a further bad installment tore open the envelope with only a listless interest. What he read stiffened him. The message said:

Updegraffe and Peacock are going to kill Jim. Come
at once. A.

With the stop at Deming and a sand-storm raging near Raton, Mr. Masterson was thirty hours reaching Dodge. They were hours without sleep. The imagination of Mr. Masterson raced ahead to Dodge, and drew him pictures. At Albuquerque he feared Jim was already dead; at Las Vegas he entertained no doubt; at Trinidad he knew it was so.

"It'll be with Jim as it was with Ed," sighed Mr. Masterson. "I'll come too late."

What increased the depression of Mr. Masterson was the raw newness and the youth of Jim. The threatened one was gifted, too, with the recklessness that had betrayed Marshal Ed. This, with his inexperience, only made him the surer victim.

As against this there would arise to Mr. Masterson the hopeless thought of Mr. Updegraffe—as coldly game as any who ever spread his blankets in Dodge! There was none more formidable! Cautious, resolute, without fear as without scruple, it called for the best name on the list when one talked of matching Mr. Updegraffe!

Mr. Peacock was not so dangerous. Still, even he might be expected to shoot an enemy who was looking the other way and thinking on something else. At the least he made a second gun to add to Mr. Updegraffe's, and with that invincible one for a side partner and only a boy to face, Mr. Peacock must be counted. These were

the sorrowful reflections of Mr. Masterson when the conductor passed through, crying:

“Dodge the next stop! Twenty minutes for lunch!”

Whether it were the work of the mysterious “A” who summoned Mr. Masterson, or of some one other than that concealed individual, word had been furnished to Mr. Peacock and Mr. Updegraffe of Mr. Masterson’s coming. There the pair stood waiting in the center of the grass-green plaza of the town.

Mr. Masterson saw them as he stepped from the train; he never saw any one else. This genius for concentration is a mark of the born gun-player. Mr. Masterson did not parley. His brother had been slain, and here before him were his destroyers. He could feel the revenge-hunger seize him! Making straight for the waiting ones he called:

“You murderers might better begin to fight right now!”

Mr. Updegraffe, with all the coolness of ice, fired point-blank at Mr. Masterson. The shot was two inches wide, and buried itself in a Pullman. At this, certain tourists who had filled the windows with their eager faces, crept beneath the seats.

Mr. Masterson, ignoring Mr. Peacock and honouring Mr. Updegraffe as the element perilous, opened on the latter. The bullet drove before it a piece of rib, and

sent the splinter of bone through Mr. Updegraffe's lungs. The death-blindness upon him, and never a notion of what he was about, he slowly walked a pace or two, and fell dead.

As Mr. Updegraffe went down, Mr. Peacock, who had not fired a shot, took refuge behind a little building that stood in the plaza and was both calaboose and Court House. This discreet disposition of himself by Mr. Peacock was doubtless allowable. None the less it smelled of an unspeakable meanness, impossible to any Bayard of the guns. Thus to take cover is the caste-mark of a mongrel.

So contemptible did this move for safety seem to Mr. Masterson that he would have walked away, leaving Mr. Peacock to enjoy his ignoble security. Mr. Peacock, however, inched his desperate nose around the corner and fired on Mr. Masterson. The bullet broke a third-story window one hundred yards away.

Mr. Masterson's rancorous interest was rearoused in Mr. Peacock by these tactics. When that gentleman again protruded his nose, Mr. Masterson shot twice at that feature like the ticking of a clock. The lead guttered the side of the building within an inch of the target. Mr. Masterson charged Mr. Peacock, who thereupon took to his heels, and escaped into Gallon's, which hostility lay open in his rear.

Mr. Masterson would have followed, but it was here that Mr. Webster, all a-tremble, ran up with a shotgun. At this Mr. Masterson's eyes shifted viciously to Mr. Webster. That the latter was shaking as with an ague did not lessen Mr. Masterson's interest in him. Mr. Webster saw that he had attracted the whole of Mr. Masterson's attention, and was in no wise reassured.

"What are you going to do with that shotgun, Web?" asked Mr. Masterson, tones low and steady but with a deadly focus on Mr. Webster.

"Well," stammered Mr. Webster, "I'm Mayor, Bat, an' this shootin' 's got to stop."

"I've been reckoned a judge," returned Mr. Masterson, coming closer to Mr. Webster, watching him the while with constant and forbidding eye; "I've been reckoned a judge, and I should say it had stopped unless you begin it again."

"I shan't begin it!" hastily asserted Mr. Webster.

"Then let me hold your shotgun," returned Mr. Masterson, voice iron and syrup. "It doesn't become your office."

And Mr. Webster gave Mr. Masterson his gun.

What Mr. Masterson next beheld was as though he saw a ghost. There across the plaza came Jim. Mr. Masterson stared.

"Aren't you dead?" he whispered.

"Dead?" echoed Jim, in wide surprise. "I was asleep over in the Wright House until your guns woke me up!"

Mr. Masterson never understood; Jim never understood; Dodge never understood! Not a soul came forward as the "A" of that message; and the telegraph man said he didn't know!

And yet it was sure that Mr. Updegraffe and Mr. Peacock were in battle array, awaiting Mr. Masterson. Mr. Peacock being guaranteed a peace, came out of Gallon's and admitted this. He, too, displayed a message signed "A." The Peacock message was from Tucson. It ran:

"Masterson has just left for Dodge to kill you and Updegraffe. A."

The cloud was never lifted. The queries of "Who sent them?" and "Why?" remain to this hour unanswered.

While the puzzle was fresh, and Mr. Peacock's message was going from hand to hand, together with the one received by Mr. Masterson, the latter—all vigilance and caution—turned to Jim.

"Get your blankets," was his low command. "The train will be here in an hour, and we're going West."

"We'll have to put you under arrest!" faltered Mr. Webster.

An ominous shadow settled about Mr. Masterson's mouth. He opened Mr. Webster's shotgun with militant prudence; there were two shells in it. Without a word he reloaded the empty chambers of his six-shooter. Being organised, he looked at Mr. Webster and shook his head.

"I must take the next train West," he said. "I haven't time to-day to be arrested."

"Only for voylatin' an ordinance!" whiningly explained Mr. Webster, who must do something for his honour. "Dodge has become a city since you was here, Bat, an' the fact is we ought to fine you five dollars for shootin' inside th' limits. As for Updegraffe: onder th' circumstances no one thinks of blamin' you for downin' him."

"City!" mused Mr. Masterson. "Five dollars! If you'll consider court as held and the fine imposed, I'll yield to these metropolitan exactions," and Mr. Masterson snapped a gold-piece towards Mr. Webster. "And now," concluded Mr. Masterson, pleasantly, tossing the shotgun into the hollow of his arm, "since I see but few familiar faces, Web, I want you to stay close by my side till I leave."

"Why, shorely!" murmured Mr. Webster, whom the suggestion discouraged.

When the train drew in, Mr. Masterson saw Jim aboard. Taking the shells from the shotgun, he returned the weapon to Mr. Webster.

"They'd be a temptation to you, Web," said Mr. Masterson, referring to the shells, "and only get you into trouble. Like many another, you're safest with an empty gun. Adios!"

"Adios!" repeated Mr. Webster, and he watched the train until it died out of sight in the West.



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